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JUNE

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Andy

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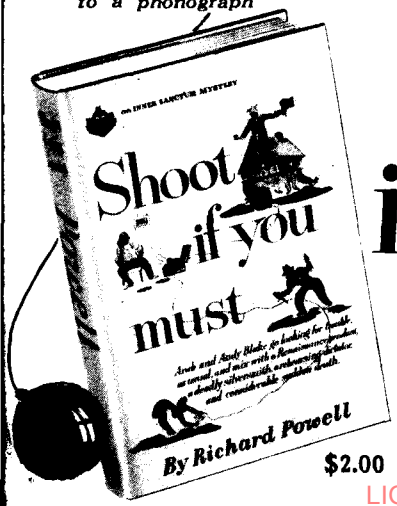

Shoot if you must

BY RICHARD POWELL

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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HOWARD HAYCRAFT, critic, and author of "*Murder for Pleasure*," the most authoritative history of the detective story.

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SECOND-PRIZE WINNER: WILLIAM FAULKNER

According to many European critics the four outstanding contemporary novelists in America are Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, John Dos Passos, and William Faulkner. Only one of these great modern writers submitted a short story to EQMM's first prize contest — William Faulkner, whose "An Error in Chemistry" was awarded one of the second prizes. It is only fair to say that while in the final balloting William Faulkner failed by a single vote to win the first prize, his story represented, in the opinion of at least two of the judges, "the most distinguished writing" in all 838 manuscripts entered in the first EQMM contest.

But that is not surprising: William Faulkner has never written any prose that did not bear the unmistakable mark of literary distinction. It has been said of Faulkner that in reality he is a split literary personality: that there are two Faulkners, one "a stylized and morbid mystic," and the other "a sharp and brilliant narrator." Surely the dichotomy of Faulkner's talent is confirmed in "An Error in Chemistry": this strange story of almost pure detection is stylized, morbid, mystical, and sharply and brilliantly narrated. It has also been said of Faulkner that his work is in the tradition of Poe and Ambrose Bierce: that it reflects the "technical ingenuity" and horror of those two masters of natively American prose. The kinship of Faulkner, Poe, and Bierce is scalpel-keen critical insight; its fundamental truth grows on you.

Now, in reading "An Error in Chemistry," we can pin down, isolate, another literary kinship — this one wholly in the detective-story genre. For the first time your Editor perceives a relationship between William Faulkner and Melville Davisson Post, between the creator of Uncle Gavin, the protagonist in "An Error in Chemistry," and Uncle Abner, the protagonist in the finest book of detective short stories written by any American author since Poe.

To begin with, there are superficial affinities: it is an amazing coincidence that both detectives are avuncular, referred to only by the title "Uncle" — Uncle Abner and Uncle Gavin. It is an equally amazing extension of the same coincidence that both characters are seen through the eyes of similar "Watsons" — young, anonymous nephews. These parallels are all the more remarkable when we consider that William Faulkner probably

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never read an Uncle Abner story in all his life — indeed, probably never even heard of Uncle Abner.

The richness of kinship, however, digs deeper: both Faulkner and Post realize fully their material. The two characters emerge with grandeur: both are imbued with an inordinate consciousness and appreciation of justice; both speak and think in an aura of mysticism; both are stalwart men, ethically, religiously, humanitarily. True, the times and the backgrounds are utterly different: Post's Uncle Abner was the "protector of the innocent and righter of wrongs," the "voice and arm of the Lord," in early 19th century Virginia; Faulkner's Uncle Gavin is a present-day Phi Beta Kappa Harvard man, county attorney in the back-country of the deep South. But both the characters, the backgrounds, and the moods of the storytelling are thoroughly American in spirit and style.

Who would have dreamed that William Faulkner of all the writers in America would, by accident or design, carry on the legend of Uncle Abner, create a modern Uncle Gavin in the great tradition? We can only hope that Mr. Faulkner will prolong the saga, continue to mould it in the purest detective vein, and send further exploits of Uncle Gavin to your Editor. Indeed, we would be honored if from now on Mr. Faulkner would consider EQMM his crime-story crucible and detective-story domicile.

AN ERROR IN CHEMISTRY

by WILLIAM FAULKNER

IT WAS Joel Flint himself who telephoned the sheriff that he had killed his wife. And when the sheriff and his deputy reached the scene, drove the twenty-odd miles into the remote back-country region where old Wesley Pritchel lived, Joel Flint himself met them at the door and asked them in. He was the foreigner, the outlander, the Yankee who had come into our county two years ago as the operator of a pitch — a lighted booth where a roulette wheel spun against a bank of nickel-plated pistols and razors and watches and harmonicas, in a traveling street carnival — and who when the carnival departed had remained, and two months later was married to Pritchel's only living child: the dim-witted spinster of almost forty who until then had shared her irascible and violent-tempered father's almost hermit-existence on the good though small farm which he owned.

But even after the marriage, old Pritchel still seemed to draw the line against his son-in-law. He built a new small house for them two miles from

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his own, where the daughter was presently raising chickens for the market. According to rumor old Pritchel, who hardly ever went anywhere anyway, had never once entered the new house, so that he saw even this last remaining child only once a week. This would be when she and her husband would drive each Sunday in the second-hand truck in which the son-in-law marketed the chickens, to take Sunday dinner with old Pritchel in the old house where Pritchel now did his own cooking and housework. In fact, the neighbors said the only reason he allowed the son-in-law to enter his house even then was so that his daughter could prepare him a decent hot meal once a week.

So for the next two years, occasionally in Jefferson, the county seat, but more frequently in the little cross-roads hamlet near his home, the son-in-law would be seen and heard too. He was a man in the middle forties, neither short nor tall nor thin nor stout (in fact, he and his father-in-law could easily have cast that same shadow which later for a short time they did), with a cold, contemptuous intelligent face and a voice lazy with anecdote of the teeming outland which his listeners had never seen — a dweller among the cities, though never from his own accounting long resident in any one of them, who within the first three months of his residence among them had impressed upon the people whose way of life he had assumed, one definite personal habit by which he presently became known throughout the whole county, even by men who had never seen him. This was a harsh and contemptuous derogation, sometimes without even provocation or reason or opportunity, of our local southern custom of drinking whiskey by mixing sugar and water with it. He called it effeminacy, a pap for children, himself drinking even our harsh, violent, illicit and unaged homemade corn whiskey without even a sip of water to follow it.

Then on this last Sunday morning he telephoned the sheriff that he had killed his wife and met the officers at his father-in-law's door and said: "I have already carried her into the house. So you won't need to waste breath telling me I shouldn't have touched her until you got here."

"I reckon it was all right to take her up out of the dirt," the sheriff said. "It was an accident, I believe you said."

"Then you believe wrong," Flint said. "I said I killed her."

And that was all.

The sheriff brought him to Jefferson and locked him in a cell in the jail. And that evening after supper the sheriff came through the side door into the study where Uncle Gavin was supervising me in the drawing of a brief. Uncle Gavin was only county, not District, attorney. But he and the sheriff, who had been sheriff off and on even longer than Uncle Gavin had been county attorney, had been friends all that while. I mean friends in the sense that two men who play chess together are friends, even though sometimes their aims are diametrically opposed. I heard them discuss it once.

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"I'm interested in truth," the sheriff said.

"So am I," Uncle Gavin said. "It's so rare. But I am more interested in justice and human beings."

"Ain't truth and justice the same thing?" the sheriff said.

"Since when?" Uncle Gavin said. "In my time I have seen truth that was anything under the sun but just, and I have seen justice using tools and instruments I wouldn't want to touch with a ten-foot fence rail."

The sheriff told us about the killing, standing, looming above the table-lamp — a big man with little hard eyes, talking down at Uncle Gavin's wild shock of prematurely white hair and his quick thin face, while Uncle Gavin sat on the back of his neck practically, his legs crossed on the desk, chewing the bit of his corncob pipe and spinning and unspinning around his finger his watch chain weighted with the Phi Beta Kappa key he got at Harvard.

"Why?" Uncle Gavin said.

"I asked him that, myself," the sheriff said. "He said, 'Why do men ever kill their wives? Call it for the insurance.' "

"That's wrong," Uncle Gavin said. "It's women who murder their spouses for immediate personal gain — insurance policies, or at what they believe is the instigation or promise of another man. Men murder their wives from hatred or rage or despair, or to keep them from talking since not even bribery not even simple absence can bridle a woman's tongue."

"Correct," the sheriff said. He blinked his little eyes at Uncle Gavin. "It's like he *wanted* to be locked up in jail. Not like he was submitting to arrest because he had killed his wife, but like he had killed her so that he would be locked up, arrested. Guarded."

"Why?" Uncle Gavin said.

"Correct too," the sheriff said. "When a man deliberately locks doors behind himself, it's because he is afraid. And a man who would voluntarily have himself locked up on suspicion of murder . . ." He batted his hard little eyes at Uncle Gavin for a good ten seconds while Uncle Gavin looked just as hard back at him. "Because he wasn't afraid. Not then nor at any time. Now and then you meet a man that aint ever been afraid, not even of himself. He's one."

"If that's what he wanted you to do," Uncle Gavin said, "why did you do it?"

"You think I should have waited a while?"

They looked at one another a while. Uncle Gavin wasn't spinning the watch chain now. "All right," he said. "Old Man Pritchel —"

"I was coming to that," the sheriff said. "Nothing."

"Nothing?" Uncle Gavin said. "You didn't even see him?" And the sheriff told that too — how as he and the deputy and Flint stood on the gallery, they suddenly saw the old man looking out at them through a window — a face rigid, furious, glaring at them through the glass for a second and then withdrawn, vanished, leaving an impression of furious exultation and raging

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triumph, and something else. . . .

"Fear?" the sheriff said. "No. I tell you, he wasn't afraid — Oh," he said. "You mean Pritchel." This time he looked at Uncle Gavin so long that at last Uncle Gavin said,

"All right. Go on." And the sheriff told that too: how they entered the house, the hall, and he stopped and knocked at the locked door of the room where they had seen the face and he even called old Pritchel's name and still got no answer. And how they went on and found Mrs. Flint on a bed in the back room with the shotgun wound in her neck, and Flint's battered truck drawn up beside the back steps as if they had just got out of it.

"There were three dead squirrels in the truck," the sheriff said. "I'd say they had been shot since daylight" — and the blood on the steps, and on the ground between the steps and the truck, as if she had been shot from inside the truck, and the gun itself, still containing the spent shell, standing just inside the hall door as a man would put it down when he entered the house. And how the sheriff went back up the hall and knocked again at the locked door —

"Locked where?" Uncle Gavin said.

"On the inside," the sheriff said — and shouted against the door's blank surface that he would break the door in if Mr. Pritchel didn't answer and open it, and how this time the harsh furious old voice answered, shouting:

"Get out of my house! Take that murderer and get out of my house."

"You will have to make a statement," the sheriff answered.

"I'll make my statement when the time comes for it!" the old man shouted. "Get out of my house, all of you!" And how he (the sheriff) sent the deputy in the car to fetch the nearest neighbor, and he and Flint waited until the deputy came back with a man and his wife. Then they brought Flint on to town and locked him up and the sheriff telephoned back to old Pritchel's house and the neighbor answered and told him how the old man was still locked in the room, refusing to come out or even to answer save to order them all (several other neighbors had arrived by now, word of the tragedy having spread) to leave. But some of them would stay in the house, no matter what the seemingly crazed old man said or did, and the funeral would be tomorrow.

"And that's all?" Uncle Gavin said.

"That's all," the sheriff said. "Because it's too late now."

"For instance?" Uncle Gavin said.

"The wrong one is dead."

"That happens," Uncle Gavin said.

"For instance?"

"That clay-pit business."

"What clay-pit business?" Because the whole county knew about old Pritchel's clay-pit. It was a formation of malleable clay right in the middle of his farm, of which people in the adjacent countryside made quite serviceable though crude pottery — those times they could manage to dig that much of it up before Mr. Pritchel saw them and drove them off. For generations, Indian and even aboriginal relics — flint arrow-heads, axes and dishes

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and skulls and thigh-bones and pipes — had been excavated from it by random boys, and a few years ago a party of archæologists from the State University had dug into it until Old Man Pritchel got there, this time with a shotgun. But everybody knew this; this was not what the sheriff was telling, and now Uncle Gavin was sitting erect in the chair and his feet were on the floor now.

"I hadn't heard about this," Uncle Gavin said.

"It's common knowledge out there," the sheriff said. "In fact, you might call it the local outdoor sport. It began about six weeks ago. They are three northern men. They're trying to buy the whole farm from old Pritchel to get the pit and manufacture some kind of road material out of the clay, I understand. The folks out there are still watching them trying to buy it. Apparently the northerners are the only folks in the country that don't know yet old Pritchel aint got any notion of selling even the clay to them, let alone the farm."

"They've made him an offer, of course."

"Probably a good one. It runs all the way from two hundred and fifty dollars to two hundred and fifty thousand, depending on who's telling it. Them northerners just don't know how to handle him. If they would just set in and convince him that everybody in the county is hoping he won't sell it to them, they could probably buy it before supper tonight." He stared at Uncle Gavin, batting his eyes again. "So the wrong one is dead, you see. If it was that clay-pit, he's no nearer to it than he was yesterday. He's worse off than he was yesterday. Then there wasn't anything between him and his pa-in-law's money but whatever private wishes and hopes and feelings that dim-witted girl might have had. Now there's a penitentiary wall, and likely a rope. It don't make sense. If he was afraid of a possible witness, he not only destroyed the witness before there was anything to be witnessed but also before there was any witness to be destroyed. He set up a signboard saying 'Watch me and mark me,' not just to this county and this state but to all folks everywhere who believe the Book where it says *Thou Shalt Not Kill* — and then went and got himself locked up in the very place created to punish him for this crime and restrain him from the next one. Something went wrong."

"I hope so," Uncle Gavin said.

"You hope so?"

"Yes. That something went wrong in what has already happened, rather than what has already happened is not finished yet."

"How not finished yet?" the sheriff said. "How can he finish whatever it is he aims to finish? Aint he already locked up in jail, with the only man in the county who might make bond to free him being the father of the woman he as good as confessed he murdered?"

"It looks that way," Uncle Gavin said. "Was there an insurance policy?"

"I don't know," the sheriff said. "I'll find that out tomorrow. But that

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aint what I want to know. I want to know why he *wanted* to be locked up in jail. Because I tell you he wasn't afraid, then nor at any other time. You already guessed who it was out there that was afraid."

But we were not to learn that answer yet. And there was an insurance policy. But by the time we learned about that, something else had happened which sent everything else temporarily out of mind. At daylight the next morning, when the jailer went and looked into Flint's cell, it was empty. He had not broken out. He had walked out, out of the cell, out of the jail, out of the town and apparently out of the country — no trace, no sign, no man who had seen him or seen anyone who might have been him. It was not yet sunup when I let the sheriff in at the side study door; Uncle Gavin was already sitting up in bed when we reached his bedroom.

"Old Man Pritchel!" Uncle Gavin said. "Only we are already too late."

"What's the matter with you?" the sheriff said. "I told you last night he was already too late the second he pulled that wrong trigger. Besides, just to be in position to ease your mind, I've already telephoned out there. Been a dozen folks in the house all night, sitting up with the — with Mrs. Flint, and old Pritchel's still locked in his room and all right too. They heard him bumping and blundering around in there just before daylight, and so somebody knocked on the door and kept on knocking and calling him until he finally opened the door wide enough to give them all a good cussing and order them again to get out of his house and stay out. Then he locked the door again. Old fellow's been hit pretty hard, I reckon. He must have seen it when it happened, and at his age, and having already druv the whole human race away from his house except that half-wit girl, until at last even she up and left him, even at any cost. I reckon it ain't any wonder she married even a man like Flint. What is it the Book says? 'Who lives by the sword, so shall he die.'?— the sword in old Pritchel's case being whatever it was he decided he preferred in place of human beings, while he was still young and hale and strong and didn't need them. But to keep your mind easy, I sent Bryan Ewell out there thirty minutes ago and told him not to let that locked door — or old Pritchel himself, if he comes out of it — out of his sight until I told him to, and I sent Ben Berry and some others out to Flint's house and told Ben to telephone me. And I'll call you when I hear anything. Which won't be anything, because that fellow's gone. He got caught yesterday because he made a mistake, and the fellow that can walk out of that jail like he did aint going to make two mistakes within five hundred miles of Jefferson or Mississippi either."

"Mistake?" Uncle Gavin said. "He just told us this morning why he wanted to be put in jail."

"And why was that?"

"So he could escape from it."

"And why get out again, when he

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was already out and could have stayed out by just running instead of telephoning me he had committed a murder?"

"I don't know," Uncle Gavin said. "Are you sure Old Man Pritchel —"

"Didn't I just tell you folks saw and talked to him through that half-opened door this morning? And Bryan Ewell probably sitting in a chair tilted against that door right this minute — or he better be. I'll telephone you if I hear anything. But I've already told you that too — that it won't be nothing."

He telephoned an hour later. He had just talked to the deputy who had searched Flint's house, reporting only that Flint had been there sometime in the night — the back door open, an oil lamp shattered on the floor where Flint had apparently knocked it while fumbling in the dark, since the deputy found, behind a big, open, hurriedly ransacked trunk, a twisted spill of paper which Flint had obviously used to light his search of the trunk — a scrap of paper torn from a billboard —

"A what?" Uncle Gavin said.

"That's what I said," the sheriff said. "And Ben says, 'All right, then send somebody else out here, if my reading ain't good enough to suit you. It was a scrap of paper which was evidently tore from the corner of a billboard because it says on the scrap in English that even I can read —' and I says, 'Tell me exactly what it is you're holding in your hand.' And he did. It's a page, from a magazine or a small paper named *Billboard* or maybe *The Billboard*. There's some more printing on it but Ben can't read it because he lost his spectacles back in the woods while he was surrounding the house to catch Flint doing whatever it was he expected to catch him doing — cooking breakfast, maybe. Do you know what it is?"

"Yes," Uncle Gavin said.

"Do you know what it means, what it was doing there?"

"Yes," Uncle Gavin said. "But why?"

"Well, I can't tell you. And he never will. Because he's gone, Gavin. Oh, we'll catch him — somebody will, I mean, someday, somewhere. But it won't be here, and it won't be for this. It's like that poor, harmless, half-witted girl wasn't important enough for even that justice you claim you prefer above truth, to avenge her."

And that did seem to be all of it. Mrs. Flint was buried that afternoon. The old man was still locked in his room during the funeral, and even after they departed with the coffin for the churchyard, leaving in the house only the deputy in his tilted chair outside the locked door, and two neighbor women who remained to cook a hot meal for old Pritchel, finally prevailing on him to open the door long enough to take the tray from them. And he thanked them for it, clumsily and gruffly, thanking them for their kindness during all the last twenty-four hours. One of the women was moved enough to offer to return tomorrow and cook another meal for him, whereupon his old-time acerbity

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and choler returned and the kind-hearted woman was even regretting that she had made the offer at all when the harsh, cracked old voice from inside the half-closed door added: "I don't need no help. I aint had no darter nohow in two years," and the door slammed in their faces and the bolt shot home.

Then the two women left, and there was only the deputy sitting in his tilted chair beside the door. He was back in town the next morning, telling how the old man had snatched the door suddenly open and kicked the chair out from beneath the dozing deputy before he could move and ordered him off the place with violent curses, and how as he (the deputy) peered at the house from around the corner of the barn a short time later, the shotgun blared from the kitchen window and the charge of squirrel shot slammed into the stable wall not a yard above his head. The sheriff telephoned that to Uncle Gavin too:

"So he's out there alone again. And since that's what he seems to want, it's all right with me. Sure I feel sorry for him. I feel sorry for anybody that has to live with a disposition like his. Old and alone, to have all this happen to him. It's like being snatched up by a tornado and whirled and slung and then slammed right back down where you started from, without even the benefit and pleasure of having taken a trip. What was it I said yesterday about living by the sword?"

"I don't remember," Uncle Gavin said. "You said a lot yesterday."

"And a lot of it was right. I said it was finished yesterday. And it is. That fellow will trip himself again someday, but it won't be here."

Only it was more than that. It was as if Flint had never been here at all — no mark, no scar to show that he had ever been in the jail cell. The meagre group of people who pitied but did not mourn, departing, separating, from the raw grave of the woman who had had little enough hold on our lives at best, whom a few of us had known without ever having seen her and some of us had seen without ever knowing her. . . . The childless old man whom most of us had never seen at all, once more alone in the house where, as he said himself, there had been no child anyway in two years. . . .

"As though none of it had ever happened," Uncle Gavin said. "As if Flint had not only never been in that cell but had never existed at all. That triumvirate of murderer, victim, and bereaved — not three flesh-and-blood people but just an illusion, a shadow-play on a sheet — not only neither men nor women nor young nor old but just three labels which cast two shadows for the simple and only reason that it requires a minimum of two in order to postulate the verities of injustice and grief. That's it. They have never cast but two shadows, even though they did bear three labels, names. It was as though only by dying did that poor woman ever gain enough substance and reality even to cast a shadow."

"But somebody killed her," I said.

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"Yes," Uncle Gavin said. "Somebody killed her."

That was at noon. About five that afternoon I answered the telephone. It was the sheriff. "Is your uncle there?" he said. "Tell him to wait. I'm coming right over." He had a stranger with him — a city man, in neat city clothes.

"This is Mr. Workman," the sheriff said. "The adjustor. There was an insurance policy. For five hundred, taken out seventeen months ago. Hardly enough to murder anybody for."

"If it ever was a murder," the adjustor said. His voice was cold too, cold yet at the same time at a sort of seething boil. "That policy will be paid at once, without question or any further investigation. And I'll tell you something else you people here don't seem to know yet. That old man is crazy. It was not the man Flint who should have been brought to town and locked up."

Only it was the sheriff who told that too: how yesterday afternoon the insurance company's Memphis office had received a telegram, signed with Old Man Pritchel's name, notifying them of the insured's death, and the adjustor arrived at Old Man Pritchel's house about two o'clock this afternoon and within thirty minutes had extracted from Old Man Pritchel himself the truth about his daughter's death: the facts of it which the physical evidence — the truck and the three dead squirrels and the blood on the steps and on the ground — supported. This was that while the daughter was cooking dinner, Pritchel and Flint had driven the truck down to Pritchel's woods lot to shoot squirrels for supper — "And that's correct," the sheriff said. "I asked. They did that every Sunday morning. Pritchel wouldn't let anybody but Flint shoot his squirrels, and he wouldn't even let Flint shoot them unless he was along" — and they shot the three squirrels and Flint drove the truck back to the house and up beside the back steps and the woman came out to take the squirrels and Flint opened the door and picked up the gun to get out of the truck and stumbled, caught his heel on the edge of the running-board and flinging up the hand carrying the gun to break his fall, so that the muzzle of the gun was pointing right at his wife's head when it went off. And Old Man Pritchel not only denied having sent the wire, he violently and profanely repudiated any and all implication or suggestion that he even knew the policy existed at all. He denied to the very last that the shooting had been any part of an accident. He tried to revoke his own testimony as to what had happened when the daughter came out to get the dead squirrels and the gun went off, repudiating his own story when he realized that he had cleared his son-in-law of murder, snatching the paper from the adjustor's hand, which he apparently believed was the policy itself, and attempting to tear it up and destroy it before the adjustor could stop him.

"Why?" Uncle Gavin said.

"Why not?" the sheriff said. "We

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had let Flint get away; Mr. Pritchel knew he was loose somewhere in the world. Do you reckon he aimed to let the man that killed his daughter get paid for it?"

"Maybe," Uncle Gavin said. "But I don't think so. I don't think he is worried about that at all. I think Mr. Pritchel knows that Joel Flint is not going to collect that policy or any other prize. Maybe he knew a little country jail like ours wasn't going to hold a wide-travelled ex-carnival man, and he expected Flint to come back out there and this time he was ready for him. And I think that as soon as people stop worrying him, he will send you word to come out there, and he will tell you so."

"Hah," the adjustor said. "Then they must have stopped worrying him. Listen to this. When I got there this afternoon, there were three men in the parlor with him. They had a certified check. It was a big check. They were buying his farm from him — lock, stock and barrel — and I didn't know land in this country was worth that much either, incidentally. He had the deed all drawn and signed, but when I told them who I was, they agreed to wait until I could get back to town here and tell somebody — the sheriff, probably. And I left, and that old lunatic was still standing in the door, shaking that deed at me and croaking: 'Tell the sheriff, damn you! Get a lawyer, too! Get that lawyer Gavin. I hear tell he claims to be pretty slick!'"

"We thank you," the sheriff said. He spoke and moved with that deliberate, slightly florid, old-fashioned courtesy which only big men can wear, except that his was constant; this was the first time I ever saw him quit anyone shortly, even when he would see them again tomorrow. He didn't even look at the adjustor again. "My car's outside," he told Uncle Gavin.

So just before sunset we drove up to the neat picket fence enclosing Old Man Pritchel's neat, bare little yard and neat, tight little house, in front of which stood the big, dust-covered car with its city license plates and Flint's battered truck with a strange Negro youth at the wheel — strange because Old Man Pritchel had never had a servant of any sort save his daughter.

"He's leaving too," Uncle Gavin said.

"That's his right," the sheriff said. We mounted the steps. But before we reached the door, Old Man Pritchel was already shouting for us to come in — the harsh, cracked old man's voice shouting at us from beyond the hall, beyond the door to the dining room where a tremendous old-fashioned telescope bag, strapped and bulging, sat on a chair and the three northerners in dusty khaki stood watching the door and Old Man Pritchel himself sat at the table. And I saw for the first time (Uncle Gavin told me he had seen him only twice) the uncombed thatch of white hair, a fierce tangle of eyebrows above steel-framed spectacles, a jut of untrimmed mustache and a scrabble of beard stained with chewing tobacco to the color of dirty cotton.

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"Come in," he said. "That lawyer Gavin, heh?"

"Yes, Mr. Pritchel," the sheriff said.

"Hehm," the old man barked. "Well, Hub," he said. "Can I sell my land, or can't I?"

"Of course, Mr. Pritchel," the sheriff said. "We hadn't heard you aimed to."

"Heh," the old man said. "Maybe this changed my mind." The check and the folded deed both lay on the table in front of him. He pushed the check toward the sheriff. He didn't look at Uncle Gavin again; he just said: "You, too." Uncle Gavin and the sheriff moved to the table and stood looking down at the check. Neither of them touched it. I could see their faces. There was nothing in them. "Well?" Mr. Pritchel said.

"It's a good price," the sheriff said.

This time the old man said "Hah!" short and harsh. He unfolded the deed and spun it to face, not the sheriff but Uncle Gavin. "Well?" he said. "You, lawyer?"

"It's all right, Mr. Pritchel," Uncle Gavin said. The old man sat back, both hands on the table before him, his head tilted back as he looked up at the sheriff.

"Well?" he said. "Fish, or cut bait."

"It's your land," the sheriff said. "What you do with it is no man's business else."

"Hah," Mr. Pritchel said. He didn't move. "All right, gentlemen." He didn't move at all; one of the strangers came forward and took up the deed. "I'll be out of the house in thirty minutes. You can take possession then, or you will find the key under the mat tomorrow morning." I don't believe he even looked after them as they went out, though I couldn't be sure because of the glare on his spectacles. Then I knew that he was looking at the sheriff, had been looking at him for a minute or more, and then I saw that he was trembling, jerking and shaking as the old tremble, although his hands on the table were as motionless as two lumps of the clay would have been.

"So you let him get away," he said.

"That's right," the sheriff said. "But you wait, Mr. Pritchel. We'll catch him."

"When?" the old man said. "Two years? Five years? Ten years? I am seventy-four years old; buried my wife and four children. Where will I be in ten years?"

"Here, I hope," the sheriff said.

"Here?" the old man said. "Didn't you just hear me tell that fellow he could have this house in thirty minutes? I own a automobile truck now; I got money to spend now, and something to spend it for."

"Spend it for what?" the sheriff said. "That check? Even this boy here would have to start early and run late to get shut of that much money in ten years."

"Spend it running down the man that killed my Ellie!" He rose suddenly, thrusting his chair back. He staggered, but when the sheriff stepped quickly toward him, he flung his arm out and seemed actually to

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strike the sheriff back a pace. "Let be," he said, panting. Then he said, harsh and loud in his cracked shaking voice: "Get out of here! Get out of my house all of you!" But the sheriff didn't move, nor did we, and after a moment the old man stopped trembling. But he was still holding to the table edge. But his voice was quiet. "Hand me my whiskey. On the sideboard. And three glasses." The sheriff fetched them — an old-fashioned cut-glass decanter and three heavy tumblers — and set them before him. And when he spoke this time, his voice was almost gentle and I knew what the woman had felt that evening when she offered to come back tomorrow and cook another meal for him: "You'll have to excuse me. I'm tired. I've had a heap of trouble lately, and I reckon I'm wore out. Maybe a change is what I need."

"But not tonight, Mr. Pritchel," the sheriff said.

And then again, as when the woman had offered to come back and cook, he ruined it. "Maybe I won't start tonight," he said. "And then maybe again I will. But you folks want to get on back to town, so we'll just drink to goodbye and better days." He unstoppered the decanter and poured whiskey into the three tumblers and set the decanter down and looked about the table. "You, boy," he said, "hand me the water bucket. It's on the back gallery shelf." Then, as I turned and started toward the door, I saw him reach and take up the sugar bowl and plunge the spoon into the sugar and then I stopped too. And I remember Uncle Gavin's and the sheriff's faces and I could not believe my eyes either as he put the spoonful of sugar into the raw whiskey and started to stir it. Because I had not only watched Uncle Gavin, and the sheriff when he would come to play chess with Uncle Gavin, but Uncle Gavin's father too who was my grandfather, and my own father before he died, and all the other men who would come to Grandfather's house who drank cold toddies as we call them, and even I knew that to make a cold toddy you do not put the sugar into the whiskey because sugar will not dissolve in raw whiskey but only lies in a little intact swirl like sand at the bottom of the glass; that you first put the water into the glass and dissolve the sugar into the water, in a ritual almost; then you add the whiskey, and that anyone like Old Man Pritchel who must have been watching men make cold toddies for nearly seventy years and had been making and drinking them himself for at least fifty-three, would know this too. And I remember how the man we had thought was Old Man Pritchel realized too late what he was doing and jerked his head up just as Uncle Gavin sprang toward him, and swung his arm back and hurled the glass at Uncle Gavin's head, and the thud of the flung glass against the wall and the dark splash it made and the crash of the table as it went over and the raw stink of the spilled whiskey from the decanter and Uncle Gavin shouting at the sheriff: "Grab him, Hub! Grab him!"

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Then we were all three on him. I remember the savage strength and speed of the body which was no old man's body; I saw him duck beneath the sheriff's arm and the entire wig came off; I seemed to see his whole face wrenching itself furiously free from beneath the makeup which bore the painted wrinkles and the false eyebrows. When the sheriff snatched the beard and mustache off, the flesh seemed to come with it, springing quick and pink and then crimson, as though in that last desperate cast he had had to beard, disguise, not his face so much as the very blood which he had spilled.

It took us only thirty minutes to find old Mr. Pritchel's body. It was under the feed room in the stable, in a shallow and hurried trench, scarcely covered from sight. His hair had not only been dyed, it had been trimmed, the eyebrows trimmed and dyed too, and the mustache and beard shaved off. He was wearing the identical garments which Flint had worn to the jail and he had been struck at least one crushing blow on the face, apparently with the flat of the same axe which had split his skull from behind, so that his features were almost unrecognizable and, after another two or three weeks underground, would perhaps have been even unidentifiable as those of the old man. And pillowed carefully beneath the head was a big ledger almost six inches thick and weighing almost twenty pounds and filled with the carefully pasted clippings which covered twenty years and more. It was the record and tale of the gift, the talent, which at the last he had misapplied and betrayed and which had then turned and destroyed him. It was all there: inception, course, peak, and then decline — the handbills, the theatre programs, the news clippings, and even one actual ten-foot poster:

SIGNOR CANOVA
Master of Illusion
He Disappears While You Watch Him
Management offers One Thousand Dollars in Cash To Any Man or Woman or Child Who . . .

Last of all was the final clipping, from our Memphis-printed daily paper, under the Jefferson date line, which was news and not press-agentry. This was the account of that last gamble in which he had cast his gift and his life against money, wealth, and lost — the clipped fragment of news-sheet which recorded the end not of one life but of three, though even here two of them cast but one shadow: not only that of the harmless dim-witted woman but of Joel Flint and Signor Canova too, with scattered among them and marking the date of that death too, the cautiously worded advertisements in *Variety* and *Billboard*, using the new changed name and no takers probably, since Signor Canova the Great was already dead then and already serving his purgatory in this circus for six months and that circus for eight — bandsman, ringman, Bornean wild man, down to the last stage where he touched bottom: the travelling from

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country town to country town with a roulette wheel wired against imitation watches and pistols which would not shoot, until one day instinct perhaps showed him one more chance to use the gift again.

"And lost this time for good," the sheriff said. We were in the study again. Beyond the open side door fireflies winked and drifted across the summer night and the crickets and tree-frogs cheeped and whirred. "It was that insurance policy. If that adjustor hadn't come to town and sent us back out there in time to watch him try to dissolve sugar in raw whiskey, he would have collected that check and taken that truck and got clean away. Instead, he sends for the adjustor, then he practically dares you and me to come out there and see past that wig and paint —"

"You said something the other day about his destroying his witness too soon," Uncle Gavin said. "She wasn't his witness. The witness he destroyed was the one we were supposed to find under that feed room."

"Witness to what?" the sheriff said. "To the fact that Joel Flint no longer existed?"

"Partly. But mostly to the first crime, the old one: the one in which Signor Canova died. He intended for that witness to be found. That's why he didn't bury it, hide it better and deeper. As soon as somebody found it, he would be at once and forever not only rich but free, free not only of Signor Canova who had betrayed him by dying eight years ago, but of Joel Flint too. Even if we had found it before he had a chance to leave, what would he have said?"

"He ought to have battered the face a little more," the sheriff said.

"I doubt it," Uncle Gavin said. "What would he have said?"

"All right," the sheriff said. "What?"

" 'Yes, I killed him. He murdered my daughter.' And what would you have said, being, as you are, the Law?"

"Nothing," the sheriff said after a time.

"Nothing," Uncle Gavin said. A dog was barking somewhere, not a big dog, and then a screech-owl flew into the mulberry tree in the back yard and began to cry, plaintive and tremulous, and all the little furred creatures would be moving now — the field mice, the possums and rabbits and foxes and the legless vertebrates — creeping or scurrying about the dark land which beneath the rainless summer stars was just dark: not desolate. "That's one reason he did it," Uncle Gavin said.

"One reason?" the sheriff said. "What's the other?"

"The other is the real one. It had nothing to do with the money; he probably could not have helped obeying it if he had wanted to. That gift he had. His first regret right now is probably not that he was caught, but that he was caught too soon, before the body was found and he had the chance to identify it as his own; before Signor Canova had had time to toss his gleaming tophat vanishing behind him and bow to the amazed and stormlike stac-

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cato of adulant palms and turn and stride once or twice and then himself vanish from the pacing spotlight — gone, to be seen no more. Think what he did: he convicted himself of murder when he could very likely have escaped by flight; he acquitted himself of it after he was already free again. Then he dared you and me to come out there and actually be his witnesses and guarantors in the consummation of the very act which he knew we had been trying to prevent. What else could the possession of such a gift as his have engendered, and the successful practising of it have increased, but a supreme contempt for mankind? You told me yourself that he had never been afraid in his life."

"Yes," the sheriff said. "The Book itself says somewhere, *Know thyself.* Ain't there another book somewhere that says, *Man, fear thyself, thine arrogance and vanity and pride?* You ought to know; you claim to be a book man. Didn't you tell me that's what that luck-charm on your watch chain means? What book is that in?"

"It's in all of them," Uncle Gavin said. "The good ones, I mean. It's said in a lot of different ways, but it's there."

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Here is a modern version of Mother Goose:

"Sing a song of sixpence,
The gentleman dressed in news,
Four and twenty blackbirds,
Murder in the mews."

As a nursery rhyme it doesn't seem to make much sense, but attributed to Mother Agatha the quatrain has an unusual detective-story significance. Each line, believe it or not, is the title of a short story by Agatha Christie!

"Sing a Song of Sixpence" is included in THE LISTERDALE MYSTERY. *"The Gentleman Dressed in News" (poetic license: the full title is "The Gentleman Dressed in Newspaper") is one of the stories in* PARTNERS IN CRIME. *"Murder in the Mews" comes from the English book of the same name, published in the United States as* DEAD MAN'S MIRROR.

That leaves the third line — "Four and Twenty Blackbirds." This story cannot be found in any of Miss Christie's published books, but it exists none the less — as the text that follows proves beyond question.

Join Hercule Poirot, the man with the egg-shaped head, in a restaurant mystery. The magnificent Poirot, so fastidious, so precise, has a nice taste when it comes to food, but no sauce, however appetizing, can fool those little grey cells. If the fish underneath is bad, Poirot's nose knows — he can smell a red herring in any culinary disguise!

FOUR AND TWENTY BLACKBIRDS

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

HERCULE POIROT was dining with his friend, Henry Bonnington, at the Gallant Endeavour in the King's Road, Chelsea.

Mr. Bonnington was fond of the Gallant Endeavour. He liked the leisurely atmosphere, he liked the food which was "plain" and "English" and "not a lot of made-up messes."

Molly, the sympathetic waitress, greeted him as an old friend. She prided herself on remembering her customers' likes and dislikes in food.

"Good evening, sir," she said, as the two men took their seats at a corner table. "You're in luck today — turkey stuffed with chestnuts — that's your favorite, isn't it? And ever such a nice Stilton we've got! Will you have soup first or fish?"

The question of food and wine settled, Mr. Bonnington unfolded his

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napkin with a sigh as Molly sped away.

"Good girl, that!" he said approvingly. "Was quite a beauty once — artists used to paint her. She knows about food, too — and that's a great deal more important. Women are very unsound on food as a rule. There's many a woman, if she goes out with a fellow she fancies, won't even notice what she eats. She'll just order the first thing she sees."

Hercule Poirot shook his head.

"*C'est terrible.*"

"Men aren't like that, thank goodness!" said Mr. Bonnington complacently.

"Never?" There was a twinkle in Hercule Poirot's eye.

"Well, perhaps when they're very young," conceded Mr. Bonnington. "Young puppies! Young fellows nowadays are all the same — no guts — no stamina. I've no use for the young — and they," he added with strict impartiality, "have no use for me. Perhaps they're right! But to hear some of these young fellows talk you'd think no man had a right to be *alive* after sixty! From the way they go on, you'd wonder more of them didn't help their elderly relations out of the world."

"It is possible," said Hercule Poirot, "that they do."

"Nice mind you've got, Poirot, I must say. All this police work saps your ideals."

Hercule Poirot smiled.

"Nevertheless," he said, "it would be interesting to make a table of accidental deaths over the age of sixty. . . . But tell me, my friend, of your own affairs. How does the world go with you?"

"Mess!" said Mr. Bonnington. "That's what's the matter with the world nowadays. Too much mess. And too much fine language. The fine language helps to conceal the mess. Like a highly flavored sauce concealing the fact that the fish underneath it is none of the best! Give me an honest fillet of sole and no messy sauce over it."

It was given him at that moment by Molly and he grunted approval.

"You know just what I like, my girl," he said.

"Well, you come here pretty regular. So I ought to know."

Hercule Poirot said: "Do people then always like the same things? Do not they like a change sometimes?"

"Not gentlemen, sir. Ladies like variety — gentlemen always like the same things."

"What did I tell you?" grunted Bonnington. "Women are fundamentally unsound about food!"

He looked around the restaurant.

"The world's a funny place. See that odd-looking old fellow with a beard in the corner? Molly'll tell you he's always here Tuesday and Thursday nights. Yet nobody here knows his name or where he lives or what his business is. It's rather odd."

When the waitress brought the portions of turkey he said: "I see you've still got Old Father Time over there?"

"That's right, sir. Tuesdays and Thursdays, his days are. Not but what

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he came in here on a *Monday* last week! It quite upset me! I felt I'd got my dates wrong and that it must be Tuesday without my knowing it! But he came in the next night as well — so the Monday was just a kind of extra, so to speak."

"An interesting deviation from habit," murmured Poirot. "I wonder what the reason was."

"Well, sir, if you ask me, I think he'd had some kind of upset or worry."

"Why did you think that? His manner?"

"No, sir — not his manner exactly. He was very quiet as he always is. Never says much except 'Good evening' when he come and goes. No, it was his *order*."

"His order?"

"I dare say you gentlemen will laugh at me." Molly flushed. "But when a gentleman has been here for ten years, you get to know his likes and dislikes. He never could bear suet pudding or blackberries and I've never known him to take thick soup — but on that Monday night he ordered thick tomato soup, beefsteak and kidney pudding and blackberry tart! Seemed as though he just didn't notice *what* he ordered!"

"Do you know," said Poirot, "I find that extraordinarily interesting."

Molly looked gratified and departed.

"Well, Poirot," said Henry Bonnington with a chuckle. "Let's have a few deductions in your best manner."

"I would prefer to hear yours first."

"Want me to be Watson, eh? Well, old fellow went to a doctor and the doctor changed his diet."

"To thick tomato soup, steak and kidney pudding and blackberry tart? I cannot imagine any doctor doing that."

"Doctors will put you onto anything."

"That is the only solution that occurs to you?"

Henry Bonnington said: "Well, seriously, I suppose there's only one explanation possible. Our unknown friend was in the grip of some powerful mental emotion. He was so perturbed by it that he literally did not notice what he was ordering or eating."

He paused a minute, and then said: "You'll be telling me next that you know just *what* was on his mind. You'll say perhaps that he was making up his mind to commit a murder."

He laughed at his own suggestion.

Hercule Poirot did not laugh.

He has admitted that at that moment he was seriously worried. He claims that he ought then to have had some inkling of what was to occur.

His friends assure him that such an idea is quite fantastic.

It was some three weeks later that Hercule Poirot and Bonnington met again — this time in the subway.

They nodded to each other, swaying about, hanging onto adjacent straps. Then at Piccadilly Circus there was a general exodus and they found seats right at the forward end of the car — a peaceful spot since nobody passed in or out that way.

"By the way," said Mr. Bonning-

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ton. "Do you remember that old boy we noticed at the Gallant Endeavour? I shouldn't wonder if he'd hopped it to a better world. He's not been there for a whole week. Molly's quite upset."

Hercule Poirot's eyes flashed.

"Indeed?" he said. "Indeed?"

Bonnington said: "D'you remember I suggested he'd been to a doctor and been put on a diet? Diet's nonsense of course — but I shouldn't wonder if he had consulted a doctor about his health and what the doctor said gave him a bit of a jolt. That would account for him ordering things off the menu without noticing what he was doing. Quite likely the jolt he got hurried him out of the world sooner than he would have gone otherwise. Doctors ought to be careful what they tell a chap."

"They usually are," said Poirot.

"This is my station," said Mr. Bonnington. "Bye-bye. Don't suppose we shall ever know now who the old boy was — not even his name. Funny world!"

He hurried out of the carriage.

Hercule Poirot, sitting frowning, looked as though he did not think it was such a funny world.

He went home and gave certain instructions to his faithful valet, Georges, and presently was running his finger down a list of names. It was a record of deaths within a certain area.

Poirot's finger stopped.

"Henry Gascoigne. 69. I might try him first."

Later in the day, Hercule Poirot was sitting in Dr. MacAndrew's surgery just off the King's Road. MacAndrew was a tall, red-haired Scotsman with an intelligent face.

"Gascoigne?" he said. "Yes, that's right. Eccentric old bird. Lived alone in one of those derelict old houses. I hadn't attended him before, but I'd seen him about and I knew who he was. It was the dairy people got the wind up first. The milk bottles began to pile up outside. In the end the people next door sent word to the police and they broke the door in and found him. He'd pitched down the stairs and broken his neck. Had on an old dressing-gown with a ragged cord — might easily have tripped himself up with it."

"I see," said Hercule Poirot. "It was quite simple — an accident."

"That's right."

"Had he any relations?"

"There's a nephew. Used to come along and see his uncle about once a month. Ramsey, his name is, Dr. George Ramsey. Lives at Wimbledon."

"How long had Mr. Gascoigne been dead when you saw him?"

"Ah!" said Dr. MacAndrew. "This is where we get official. Not less than forty-eight hours and not more than seventy-two hours. He was found on the morning of the 6th. Actually, we got closer than that. He had a letter in the pocket of his dressing gown — written on the 3rd — posted in Wimbledon that afternoon — would have been delivered somewhere around 9:20 P.M. That puts the time of death

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at after 9:20 on the evening of the 3rd. That agrees with the contents of the stomach and the processes of digestion. He had had a meal about two hours before death. I examined him on the morning of the 6th and his condition was quite consistent with death having occurred sixty hours previously — around 10 P.M. on the 3rd."

"It all seems very consistent. Tell me, when was he last seen alive?"

"He was seen in the King's Road about seven o'clock that same evening, Thursday the 3rd, and he dined at the Gallant Endeavour restaurant at 7:30. It seems he always dined there on Thursdays."

"He had no other relations? Only this nephew?"

"There was a twin brother. The whole story is rather curious. They hadn't seen each other for years. As a young man Henry was by way of being an artist, you know. An extremely bad one. It seems the other brother, Anthony Gascoigne, married a very rich woman and gave up art — and the brothers quarreled over it. Hadn't seen each other since, I believe. But oddly enough, *they died on the same day.* The elder twin passed away at one o'clock on the afternoon of the 3rd. Probably just a coincidence — but there it is."

"Is the other brother's wife alive?"

"No, she died some years ago."

"Where did Anthony Gascoigne live?"

"He had a house on Kingston Hill. He was, I believe, from what Dr. Ramsey tells me, very much of a recluse."

Hercule Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

The Scotsman looked at him keenly.

"What exactly have you got in your mind, M. Poirot?" he asked bluntly. "I've answered your questions — as was my duty seeing the credentials you brought. But I'm in the dark as to what it's all about."

Poirot said slowly: "A simple case of accidental death, that's what you said. What I have in mind is equally simple — a simple push."

Dr. MacAndrew looked startled.

"In other words, murder! Have you any grounds for that belief?"

"No," said Poirot. "It is a mere supposition."

"There must be something —" persisted the other.

Poirot did not speak.

MacAndrew said, "If it's the nephew, Ramsey, you suspect, I don't mind telling you here and now that you are barking up the wrong tree. Ramsey was playing bridge in Wimbledon from 8:30 till midnight. That came out at the inquest."

Poirot murmured: "And presumably it was verified. The police are careful."

The doctor said: "Perhaps you know something against him?"

"I didn't know that there was such a person until you mentioned him."

"Then you suspect somebody else?"

"No, no. It is not that at all. It's a case of the routine habits of the human animal. That is very important. And the dead M. Gascoigne does not fit in. It is all wrong, you see."

"I really don't understand."

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Hercule Poirot smiled. He rose and the doctor rose also.

"You know," said MacAndrew, "honestly, I can't see anything the least bit suspicious about the death of Henry Gascoigne."

The little man spread out his hands.

"I'm an obstinate man — a man with a little idea — and nothing to support it! By the way, did Henry Gascoigne have false teeth?"

"No, his own teeth were in excellent preservation. Very creditable indeed at his age."

"He looked after them well — they were white and well brushed?"

"Yes, I noticed them particularly."

"Not discolored in any way?"

"No. I don't think he was a smoker if that is what you mean."

"I did not mean that precisely — it was just a long shot — which probably will not come off! Goodby, Dr. MacAndrew. Thank you for your kindness."

He shook the doctor's hand and departed.

"And now," he said, "for the long shot."

*

At the Gallant Endeavour, he sat down at the same table that he had shared with Bonnington. The girl who served him was not Molly. Molly, the girl told him, was away on a holiday.

It was just seven and Hercule Poirot found no difficulty in entering into conversation with the girl on the subject of old Mr. Gascoigne.

"Yes," she said. "He'd been here for years and years. But none of us girls ever knew his name. We saw about the inquest in the paper, and there was a picture of him. 'There,' I said to Molly, 'if that isn't our Old Father Time —' as we used to call him."

"He dined here on the evening of his death, did he not?"

"That's right. Thursday, the 3rd. He was always here on Tuesdays and Thursdays — punctual as a clock."

"You don't remember, I suppose, what he had for dinner?"

"Now let me see, it was mulligatawny soup, that's right, and beefsteak pudding or was it the mutton? — no pudding, that's right, and blackberry and apple pie and cheese. And then to think of him going home and falling down those stairs that very same evening. A frayed dressing-gown cord they said it was as caused it. Of course, his clothes were always something awful — old fashioned and put on anyhow, and all tattered, and yet he *had* a kind of air, all the same, as though he was *somebody!* Oh, we get all sorts of interesting customers here."

She moved off.

Hercule Poirot ate his sole.

Armed with introductions from a certain influential quarter, Hercule Poirot found no difficulty at all in dealing with the coroner for the district.

"A curious figure, the deceased man Gascoigne," he observed. "A lonely, eccentric old fellow. But his decease seems to arouse unusual attention."

He looked with some curiosity at his visitor as he spoke.

Hercule Poirot chose his words

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carefully: "There are circumstances connected with it, Monsieur, which make investigation desirable."

"Well, how can I help you?"

"It is, I believe, within your province to order documents produced in your court to be destroyed, or to be impounded — as you think fit. A certain letter was found in the pocket of Henry Gascoigne's dressing gown, was it not? A letter from his nephew, Dr. George Ramsey?"

"Quite correct. The letter was produced at the inquest as helping to fix the time of death."

"Is that letter still available?"

Hercule Poirot waited rather anxiously for the reply.

When he heard that the letter was still available for examination he drew a sigh of relief.

When it was finally produced he studied it with some care. It was written in a slightly cramped handwriting with a stylographic pen. It ran as follows:

"*Dear Uncle Henry:*

I am sorry to tell you that I have had no success as regards Uncle Anthony. He showed no enthusiasm for a visit from you and would give me no reply to your request that he would let bygones be bygones. He is, of course, extremely ill, and his mind is inclined to wander. I should fancy that the end is very near. He seemed hardly to remember who you were.

I am sorry to have failed you, but I can assure you that I did my best.

Your affectionate nephew,

GEORGE RAMSEY."

The letter itself was dated 3rd November. Poirot glanced at the envelope's postmark — 4:30 P.M.

He murmured: "It is beautifully in order, is it not?" . . .

Kingston Hill was his next objective. After a little trouble, with the exercise of good-humored pertinacity, he obtained an interview with Amelia Hill, cook-housekeeper to the late Anthony Gascoigne.

Mrs. Hill was inclined to be stiff and suspicious at first, but the charming geniality of this strange-looking foreigner soon had its effect. Mrs. Amelia Hill found herself, as had so many other women before her, pouring out her troubles to a sympathetic listener.

For fourteen years she had had charge of Mr. Gascoigne's household — *not* an easy job! No, indeed! Many a woman would have quailed under the burdens *she* had had to bear! Eccentric the poor gentleman was and no denying it. Remarkably close with his money — a kind of mania with him it was — and he as rich a gentleman as might be! But Mrs. Hill had served him faithfully, and put up with his ways, and naturally she'd expected at any rate a *remembrance*. But no — nothing at all! Just an old will that left all his money to his wife and if she predeceased him then everything to his brother, Henry. A will made years ago. It didn't seem fair!

Gradually Hercule Poirot detached her from her main theme of unsatisfied cupidity. It was indeed a heartless injustice! Mrs. Hill could not be blamed for feeling hurt and surprised.

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It was well known that Mr. Gascoigne was tight-fisted about money. It had even been said that the dead man had refused his only brother assistance. Mrs. Hill probably knew all about that.

"Was it that that Dr. Ramsey came to see him about?" asked Mrs. Hill. "I knew it was something about his brother, but I thought it was just that his brother wanted to be reconciled. They'd quarreled years ago."

"I understand," said Poirot, "that Mr. Gascoigne refused absolutely?"

"That's right enough," said Mrs. Hill with a nod. "'*Henry?*' he says, rather weaklike. '*What's this about Henry? Haven't seen him for years and don't want to. Quarrelsome fellow, Henry.*' Just that."

The conversation then reverted to Mrs. Hill's own special grievances.

With some difficulty Hercule Poirot took his leave without breaking off the conversation too abruptly.

And so, just after the dinner hour, he came to Elmcrest, Dorset Road, Wimbledon, the residence of Dr. George Ramsey.

The doctor was in. Hercule Poirot was shown into the surgery and there presently Dr. George Ramsey came to him, obviously just risen from the dinner table.

"I'm not a patient, doctor," said Hercule Poirot. "And my coming here is, perhaps, somewhat of an impertinence — but I believe in plain and direct dealing. I do not care for lawyers and their long-winded, roundabout methods."

He had certainly aroused Ramsey's interest. The doctor was a clean-shaven man of middle height. His hair was brown but his eyelashes were almost white, which gave his eyes a pale, boiled appearance. His manner was brisk and not without humor.

"Lawyers?" he said raising his eyebrows. "Hate the fellows! You rouse my curiosity, my dear sir. Pray sit down."

Poirot did so and then produced one of his professional cards.

George Ramsey's white eyelashes blinked.

Poirot leaned forward confidentially. "A good many of my clients are women," he said.

"Naturally," said Dr. George Ramsey, with a slight twinkle.

"As you say, naturally," agreed Poirot. "Women distrust the official police. They prefer private investigations. They do not want to have their troubles made public. An elderly woman came to consult me a few days ago. She was unhappy about a husband she'd quarreled with many years before. This husband of hers was your uncle, the late Mr. Gascoigne."

George Ramsey's face went purple.

"My uncle? Nonsense! His wife died many years ago."

"Not your uncle, Mr. *Anthony* Gascoigne. Your uncle, Mr. *Henry* Gascoigne."

"Uncle Henry? But *he* wasn't married!"

"Oh, yes, he was," said Hercule Poirot, lying unblushingly. "Not a doubt of it. The lady even brought

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along her marriage certificate."

"It's a lie!" cried George Ramsey. His face was now as purple as a plum. "I don't believe it. You're an impudent liar."

"It is too bad, is it not?" said Poirot. "You have committed murder for nothing."

"Murder?" Ramsey's voice quavered. His pale eyes bulged with terror.

"By the way," said Poirot, "I see you have been eating blackberry tart again. An unwise habit. Blackberries are said to be full of vitamins, but they may be deadly in other ways. On this occasion I rather fancy they have helped to put a rope around a man's neck — your neck, Dr. Ramsey."

"You see, *mon ami*, where you went wrong was over your fundamental assumption." Hercule Poirot, beaming placidly across the table at his friend, waved an expository hand. "A man under severe mental stress doesn't choose that time to do something that he's never done before. His reflexes just follow the track of least resistance. A man who is upset about something *might* conceivably come down to dinner dressed in his pajamas — but they will be his *own* pajamas — not somebody else's.

"A man who dislikes thick soup, suet pudding and blackberries suddenly orders all three one evening. *You* say, because he is thinking of something else. But *I say that a man who has got something on his mind will order automatically the dish he has ordered most often before.*

"*Eh bien*, then, what other explanation could there be? I simply could not think of a reasonable explanation. And I was worried! The incident was all wrong.

"Then you told me that the man had disappeared. He had missed a Tuesday and a Thursday the first time for years. I liked that even less. A queer hypothesis sprang up in my mind. If I were right about it *the man was dead.* I made inquiries. The man *was* dead. And he was very neatly and tidily dead. In other words the bad fish was covered up with the sauce!

"He had been seen in the King's Road at seven o'clock. He had had dinner here at 7:30 — two hours before he died. It all fitted in — the evidence of the stomach contents, the evidence of the letter. Much too much sauce! You couldn't see the fish at all!

"Devoted nephew wrote the letter, devoted nephew had beautiful alibi for time of death. Death very simple — a fall down the stairs. Simple accident? Or murder? Everyone says the former.

"Devoted nephew only surviving relative. Devoted nephew will inherit — but is there anything *to* inherit? Uncle notoriously poor.

"But there is a brother. And brother in his time had married a rich wife. And brother lives in a big rich house on Kingston Hill, so it would seem that rich wife must have left him all her money. You see the sequence — rich wife leaves money to Anthony, Anthony leaves money to Henry, Henry's money goes to George."

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"A pretty theory," said Mr. Bonnington. "But what did you do?"

"Once you *know* — you can usually get hold of what you want. Henry had died two hours after a *meal* — that is all the inquest really bothered about. But supposing that meal was not dinner, but *lunch?* Put yourself in George's place. George wants money — badly. Anthony Gascoigne is dying — but his death is no good to George. His money goes to Henry, and Henry Gascoigne may live for years. So Henry must die too — and the sooner the better — but his death must take place *after* Anthony's, and at the same time George must have an alibi. Henry's habit of dining regularly at a restaurant on two evenings of the week suggests an alibi to George. Being cautious, he tries his plan out first. *He impersonates his uncle one Monday evening at the restaurant in question.*

"It goes without a hitch. Everyone there accepts him as his uncle. He is satisfied. He has only to wait till Uncle Anthony shows definite signs of pegging out. The time comes. He mails a letter to his uncle on the afternoon of the 2nd November but dates it the 3rd. He comes up to town on the afternoon of the 3rd, calls on his uncle, and carries his scheme into action. A sharp shove and down the stairs goes Uncle Henry.

"George hunts about for the letter he has written, and shoves it in the pocket of his uncle's dressing gown. At 7:30 he is at the Gallant Endeavour, beard, bushy eyebrows, all complete. Undoubtedly Mr. Henry Gascoigne is alive at 7:30. Then a rapid metamorphosis in a lavatory and back full speed to Wimbledon and an evening of bridge. The perfect alibi."

Mr. Bonnington looked at him.

"But the postmark on the letter?"

"Oh, that was very simple. The postmark was smudgy. Why? It had been altered with lampblack from Nov. 2nd to Nov. 3rd. You would not notice it *unless you were looking for it.* And finally there were the blackbirds."

"Blackbirds?"

"Four-and-twenty blackbirds baked in a pie! Or blackberries if you prefer to be literal! George, you comprehend, was after all not quite a good enough actor. He *looked* like his uncle and *walked* like his uncle and *spoke* like his uncle and had his uncle's beard and eyebrows, but he forgot to *eat* like his uncle. He ordered the dishes that he himself liked.

"Blackberries discolor the teeth — the corpse's teeth were not discolored, and yet Henry Gascoigne ate blackberries at the Gallant Endeavour that night. But there were no blackberries in the stomach. I asked this morning. Plenty of evidence once you look for it. I called on George and rattled him. That finished it! He had been eating blackberries again, by the way. A greedy fellow — cared a lot about food. *Eh bien,* greed will hang him all right unless I am very much mistaken."

A waitress brought them two portions of blackberry-and-apple tart.

"Take it away," said Mr. Bonnington. "One can't be too careful. Bring me a small helping of sago pudding."

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THIRD-PRIZE WINNER: CRAIG RICE

In the January 28, 1946, issue of "Time" magazine Craig Rice came into her own. On the cover was a full-color portrait painted by Artzybasheff, with a purple background showing a smoky ghost with six arms — a sextopus, and we invent the word with malice aforethought — rising gruesomely out of typewriter keys; the ratiocinative wraith is black-masked and his (or her?) six hands grasp, reading from left to right, a dagger, a rope (held semi-noose-like in two hands), a bottle of poison, an automatic, and a hypodermic syringe (note the extraordinary restraint of the artist: no blunt instrument — or have blunt instruments gone out of fashion?). And inside "Time" was a three-page article on the past, present, and probable future of the lady known as Craig.

In case you happened to miss the "Time" profile, we give you some of its highlights. . . . Between the ages of 18 and 30 Craig Rice indulged in a dozen years of Bohemian life: three bungled attempts at marriage; innumerable failures to write poetry, novels, and music. . . . The distinctively American type of detective story, originated by Dashiell Hammett, has been called tough, hardboiled, and wacky — a combination of hard drink, hilarity, and homicide; Craig Rice, says "Time," is virtually the only woman of this school; further, an outgrowth of this American genre is the detective farce of which Craig Rice is also an exponent; she invests (still quoting "Time") unholy living and heinous dying with a high atmosphere of mixed excitement and amusement; the excitement is provided by realism of a sort — the realism which goes with the ruthlessness of gangsters and other criminal ugliness — and it is set to dialogue of the Hemingway type. . . .

Craig Rice is also Michael Venning and Daphne Sanders — 11 books signed by Rice, 3 by Venning, and 1 by Sanders, as of the time of the "Time" article; when Michael Venning's biography was called for by WHO'S WHO, *Craig posed for Michael's picture (as a gag) wearing a crêpe beard and her husband's coat. . . . Interior Decorating Note: The master bedroom contains the "Craig Rice dressing table," a wide, crinoline-draped affair supported by two female legs appropriately gartered and stockinged in black mesh; (how about the bottles of perfume on the dressing table? — aren't they reformed whiskey bottles?) . . .*

"Time" makes the following statement which caught your Editor in the solar plexus and floored him for a full count: "Women (says "Time") have always excelled as detective-story writers." When your Editor recov-

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ered sufficiently from this haymaker to peck out a protest, he gathered the atomized remains of his self-respect to ask if the editors of "Time" ever heard of: Edgar Allan Poe, Émile Gaboriau, Wilkie Collins, A. Conan Doyle, R. Austin Freeman, Gilbert K. Chesterton, Melville Davisson Post, E. C. Bentley, Ernest Bramah, Freeman Wills Crofts, H. C. Bailey, Edgar Wallace, Philip MacDonald, John Rhode, Anthony Berkeley, Francis Iles, Earl Derr Biggers, S. S. Van Dine, Dashiell Hammett, John Dickson Carr, Georges Simenon, Erle Stanley Gardner, Rex Stout, Eric Ambler, Raymond Chandler, and not to put too fine a point on it, Ellery Queen — and we apologize to all the other good men and true who have excelled as detective-story writers but whose names are not included only because space limitations prevent us from going on forever. In further rebuttal we call to the stand the following distinguished witnesses: SHAKESPEARE: *Let every man be master of . . . time.* SIR WALTER RALEIGH: *History hath triumphed over time.* OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES: *Old Time is a liar!* BEN JONSON: *That old bald cheater, Time.* LONGFELLOW: *Time, with reckless hand, has torn out half the leaves from the Book of Human Life.* MILTON: *Time, the subtle thief.* PLATO: *As the years go by, time will change and even reverse many . . . opinions.*

One last quotation from "Time": Craig Rice's stories never appear in magazines. Oh, "Time"! In its issue of March 1943, EQMM brought you "His Heart Could Break," the first Craig Rice short story about John J. Malone. In our safe-deposit vaults we have the second Craig Rice short about John J. Malone — "The Bad Luck Murders" — which will appear in a forthcoming issue of EQMM. And following this song-and-dance introduction is Craig Rice's prizewinning story, "Goodbye, Goodbye!" — the third short about that hard-living, hard-drinking little criminal lawyer, John J. Malone. And also coming in a future issue of EQMM is Craig Rice's first Michael Venning short story. The defense rests. . . .

GOODBYE, GOODBYE!

by CRAIG RICE

A WOMAN in the crowd gasped, almost screamed. Near her, a man in a grey topcoat covered his eyes with his hands. Half a block away an overdressed, overpainted and very pretty girl sank to her knees on the concrete sidewalk and prayed. But most of the crowd stared upward in silence in half-horrified, half-delighted fascination.

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On a narrow ledge twenty-two stories above the street, there was what seemed, from this distance, to be a small dark blob. The crowd knew that the blob was a girl in a mink coat, that she had been crouched on the ledge for hours, and that a minister, a policeman and an eminent psychiatrist were pleading and reasoning with her through the open window.

John J. Malone, Chicago criminal lawyer, was not one of the crowd. He was only trying to push his way through it to the entrance of the hotel, where a profitable client was waiting for him, one who was ready to hand over a fat retainer before giving himself up on a burglary rap which John J. Malone knew he could beat in five minutes even before a prejudiced jury.

The important business of collecting that retainer was one reason why the little lawyer didn't notice the crowd at first. A lone, crumpled five dollar bill was in his right pants pocket, and he had a date with a very special and very expensive blonde just half an hour from now. And this particular client would pay the retainer in cash.

Malone was beginning to lose his temper with the crowd when he suddenly realized that the space in front of the hotel was roped off. That was when he looked up.

"Been there for hours," a man next to him murmured, almost dreamily.

For a minute he stood there, horror-frozen. His mind took in what was being said around him, even though he wasn't conscious of hearing it, and he became aware of the whole story — the fire department, the police, the minister, and the psychiatrist.

There was a lump of ice where his stomach had been just a little while ago. Life was so wonderful, even with the remains of yesterday's warmed-over hangover, even with only five bucks in your pants and a blonde waiting for you. If he could only explain that to the undecided dark blob clinging to the ledge twenty-two stories above. *Undecided*—! That was it. That was the key.

Suddenly he pushed his way, ruthlessly and almost blindly, through the rest of the crowd, ran past the roped-off space where the fire department was holding life nets, past the frightened young cop who tried to bar his way into the building, and through the deserted lobby. He yelled for a boy to operate one of the empty elevators, finally got attention by threatening to operate it himself, and was shot up to the twenty-second floor.

It was easy to find the room. The door was open, spilling light into the hall. A cop at the door said, "Malone —!" tried to stop him, and was shoved aside. The minister, the eminent psychiatrist and Det. Lt. Klutchetsky from the police department were shoved aside too.

At the window, he paused and drew a long, slow breath. Down the ledge from him was a white face and two terrified eyes. Malone spoke very softly and easily.

"Don't be afraid. You can get back here all right. Just creep along the

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ledge and keep your hands on the wall, and keep looking at me."

The dark figure stirred. She was not more than a few inches beyond the reach of his arm, but he knew better than to hold out a hand to her, yet.

"There's nothing to fear. Even if you should fall, they'll catch you with the nets. The worst that can happen to you is a skinned knee and a few bruises." Malone crossed his fingers for the barefaced lie. "You're as safe as if you were in your own bed." It was the same tone he'd used innumerable times to nervous witnesses.

It was a full minute before the girl began to move, but when she did, it was in the direction of the window.

"Come on now," the little lawyer coaxed. "It's not so far. Only a bit of a ways now. Take it easy."

She managed about a foot and a half along the ledge, and stopped. He could see her face, and the terror on it, clearly now.

"You won't fall," Malone said. It was an almost heart-breaking effort to keep from reaching a hand to her.

Inside the room, and down on the sidewalk, the spectators were silent and breathless.

For just a moment it seemed to Malone that she'd smiled at him. No, it hadn't been a smile, just a relaxation of those frozen muscles around her mouth. How long had she been crouching on that ledge? He didn't dare guess.

Nor did he dare take his eyes from her face and look down, for fear her gaze would turn with his.

Inch by inch she moved toward the waiting window. Only a few feet away she hesitated, started to look down, and turned a shade more pale.

"For Pete's sake, hurry up," Malone said crossly. "It's colder than a Scandinavian Hell with this window open."

That did it. She actually did smile, and managed the last bit of window ledge, twenty-two stories up from the ground, like a little girl sliding on a cellar door. Finally Malone lifted her over the sill, and Klutchetsky, moving fast and breathing hard, slammed the window shut and locked it.

The eminent psychiatrist sank down on the nearest chair, his face a mottled grey. Klutchetsky and the uniformed cop stood glaring at her.

"You're a wicked, wicked girl," the minister began.

"Shut up," Malone told him absentmindedly. He looked closely at the girl, who stood clutching the edge of the window frame for support.

She was small, and delicately built. Pale, distraught and disheveled as she was, she was something very special. Her chalk-white and definitely dirty face was triangular in shape, and lovely. Her frightened eyes were brown, and large, and ringed with long, dark lashes. Her tangled hair was honey blonde. Her mouth, naked of lipstick and with marks showing where teeth had almost bitten through a lower lip, was a pallid, wistful flower.

One more minute, Malone told himself, and he'd be writing poetry.

The mink coat was a magnificent one. The dusty rose dress under it came, Malone realized, from one of

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the very best shops. The torn and muddy stockings he recognized as nylons. Jewels glittered at her slim wrists.

"As I live and breathe!" Malone said pleasantly, taking out a cigar and starting to unwrap it. "Doris Dawn!"

Doris Dawn drew her first long breath in many hours. She glanced around the ring of hostile faces, then flung herself into the security of Malone's warm and obvious friendliness. A faint color began to come back into her cheeks.

"You saved my life. I was out there — *forever*, trying to get enough nerve to crawl to a window. High places — they always —" The color faded again.

"You'd better put some makeup on," Malone growled. "You look terrible."

She almost smiled. She fumbled through her coat pockets, found a compact and lipstick, dropped them both through her trembling fingers. Malone picked them up for her. Pink Primrose lipstick, he noted approvingly. Exactly right for her pale skin.

He said, soothingly, "Relax. You're safe now."

"No. No, I'm not. That's it." She turned to Klutchetsky. "You're a policeman. *Do* something. Someone tried to kill me."

Klutchetsky and the eminent psychiatrist exchanged significant glances.

"Okay, sister," Klutchetsky said wearily. "Just come along quietly now."

Malone said, "Just a minute. Since when is it customary, in a case of attempted murder, to arrest the intended corpse?"

"Look, Malone," Klutchetsky said. He paused and sighed deeply. "We appreciate your help. Okay. Now suppose you let the police department handle its own problems in its own way."

"But I'm not a *problem*," the girl cried out. "*Someone* —"

"That's what you think," Klutchetsky told her. "Am I right, Doc?" He paused. The eminent psychiatrist nodded his head briskly.

"He tried to kill me," the girl gasped. "He will again. He put me out on that ledge and left me there. I was too scared to crawl back. I just held on. Until —"

"And who is this 'he'," Klutchetsky interrupted skeptically, "and what does he look like?"

"I don't know. I've never seen him."

The police officer turned to the eminent psychiatrist. "See what I mean, Doc?" Again the psychiatrist nodded.

She began to sob, dry-eyed. She took a step towards Malone. "You believe me, don't you? Don't let them drag me away to — to a hospital. They're the police. Make them find him. Make them protect me."

"What I always say is," Malone murmured, lighting his cigar, "what do we pay taxes for." He paused long enough to glare at the police officer and his aide. "But what you need is a good lawyer."

"Find me one!"

Malone smiled at her reassuringly. "I *have* found you one."

"Listen," Klutchetsky said. "This is the third time she's tried this. She's

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bats. Just ask Doctor Updegraff."

"A very interesting case," Doctor Updegraff purred. "Of course, after I have given it some study —"

"Nuts!" Malone said rudely.

"Precisely," the psychiatrist said.

Malone thought of a number of things he would like to do to Doctor Updegraff, all of them unkind, and most of them unmentionable. He thought, also, about the immediate problem. If Klutchetsky and Dr. Updegraff happened to be right, Doris Dawn would be better off in a hospital, and the sooner the better. On the other hand, if she was telling the truth — and Malone believed she was — she would be safer in jail, right now.

"As this young lady's lawyer," he began.

Klutchetsky said, "Now, Malone. You heard what the doc here said. And maybe you remember this babe's mother."

"I do," Malone said, "I was secretly in love with her for years." He reflected that every impressionable male who'd been to the theater between 1915 and 1926 remembered Diana Dawn, who'd committed suicide at the very height of her career.

"Okay," Klutchetsky said. "this babe takes poison, only she's found in time and luckily she didn't take much. Then she goes to work on her wrists with a razor blade, but she misses the right spot and anyhow a hotel maid finds her before she bled too much. Now she takes a room here under a phony name, and decides to jump."

The little lawyer was silent for a moment. Maybe, this time, Klutchetsky was right and he was wrong. Still —

"How about notes?" he asked. "Did she leave any?"

"Notes!" the police officer snorted, "what do you call these?" He waved an arm around the room.

Malone looked, and realized that the room was filled with mirrors. On every one of them was written, in lipstick, "*Goodbye, Goodbye.*" The letters were the color of dried blood. The bathroom door was a full-length mirror, and on it was scrawled, over and over, "Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye —"

"I didn't write it!" Doris Dawn said.

Malone looked at her closely, then back at the dark red letters. He said to Klutchetsky, "I'm convinced."

The minister muttered something about the use of excessive makeup, the perils of the city, juvenile delinquency, and his next Sunday's sermon. Dr. Updegraff muttered something about the significance of the use of lipstick for a farewell message.

The girl gave a tragic little moan. "But I thought you'd help me!"

"Don't look now," Malone said, "but I am." He turned to Klutchetsky. "Better have the squad car go round to the alley. There must be a flock of reporters in the lobby by now. We'll go down the freight elevator."

Klutchetsky nodded his thanks, told the young cop to get headquarters on the phone, and said to Malone, "You'll have to show us the way. How come you always know where the freight elevators in hotels are, anyhow?"

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"I have my secrets," Malone said coyly, "and all of them are sacred." He didn't add that, among those secrets, was the knowledge that the ledge outside the window was a good two and a half feet wide, and that it had a rim extending up for at least six inches.

One reason was that he didn't want to tell how he knew.

He held Doris Dawn firmly by the elbow as they walked to the door. Dr. Updegraff and the minister had volunteered, with willing helpfulness, indeed, even hopefulness, to stay behind and cope with the reporters. Malone had muttered something unpleasant about people who were their own press agents and thus kept honest, but starving, ex-newspapermen out of jobs.

Out in the alley, Klutchetsky thanked Malone for guiding them down the freight elevator, said goodnight, and ushered Doris Dawn into the back of the car. Malone promptly popped in beside her.

"Now wait a minute," Klutchetsky said, "You can't do this, Malone."

"I can," Malone said pleasantly, "I will, and I am." He smiled. "Did you ever remember to tell your wife about that trip we took to the races while she was visiting her cousin in the east —" He paused.

"Oh, all right," the police officer growled. He slammed the car door shut and climbed in beside the uniformed driver.

As the car turned into Michigan Avenue, where the crowd was thinning and the fire department was packing up to leave, her hand crept into his like a cold, frightened kitten creeping into a feather bed.

"I didn't, you know," she whispered "I couldn't have. There wasn't any reason. I've always had fun. I've always had everything. Until this started, I've always been happy."

"I know it," Malone whispered back. "I've heard you sing." He curled his fingers reassuringly around hers.

"But I don't want you to believe it because I say so and because you're sorry for me. I want you to believe it because something proves it to you. I want you to read my diary, and then you'll *really* know."

She reached into her pocket. "You trusted me, so I'm going to trust you. Here's the key to my house. It's 1117 Gay Street. You can remember that, can't you? The light switch is just to the right of the door, and the library is just to the left of the hall. There's a desk in the library and my diary is in the middle drawer, under an old telephone book. You've got to read it. And please don't mind there being a little dust everywhere because I've been too busy to do any dusting myself, and my housekeeper had to go to Clinton, Iowa, because her daughter-in-law had a baby."

Malone blinked. Doris Dawn, radio singing star, had spent agonizing hours on a window ledge twenty-two stories up from the street. She was in danger of being hustled into a psychopathic ward and if she were turned loose, she was probably in danger of being murdered. But she worried for fear he'd think her house needed dusting. It

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didn't make sense. But then, neither did Doris.

"Tell me," he said, "about this mysterious 'he'—"

"Honest," she said, "I never got a look at him. That first time —" The car was pulling up in front of headquarters. "It's all in the diary."

He squeezed her hand, tight. "Look. Don't answer any questions. Don't talk to any reporters. Refer everything to your lawyer. That's me. And don't be afraid."

A big sob of pity rose in his throat. She was so lovely, and so frightened. He wanted to put a comforting arm around her for just one moment. But Klutchetsky was already pulling open the car door.

"You'll be safe," he promised her. "I'll raise a little hell."

He raised so much hell that Doris Dawn was taken from headquarters in a police ambulance, two jumps ahead of the reporters, placed in a private hospital under an assumed name and with a police guard at the door. Indeed he was so efficient about his hell-raising that it was not until he was out on the sidewalk, in the cold spring rain, that he remembered overlooking a number of very important details.

One, he had neglected to tell Doris Dawn the name of her self-appointed lawyer. Two, he had neglected to learn the name of the private hospital, and the name under which she'd been registered.

He reflected that he'd probably have more trouble finding his client than she would have finding her lawyer. But those were the minor details.

The more important items were that, while appointing himself her lawyer, he'd forgotten to mention the delicate matter of a retainer. And worse than that, the original client he'd been on his way to see had certainly located another mouthpiece by this time.

Finally, the expensive blonde had never been known to wait for anyone more than half an hour. He was almost two hours late, by now.

Malone sighed unhappily and regretted having spent most of that lone five dollar bill buying magazines and candy for Doris Dawn at the newsstand, before the police ambulance took her away. Then he thought about Doris Dawn and decided he didn't regret it too much.

There was a grand total of eighty-seven cents in his pocket. The little lawyer ducked into the nearest corner bar and spent seventy-five cents of it on three gin-and-beers while he thought over all he knew about Doris Dawn.

Her mother, Diana Dawn, had been one of the most beautiful women of her, or any other, generation. Talented, too, though she hadn't needed to be. It was worth the price of a theater ticket just to look at her, she didn't have to utter one word or sing one note. She'd married a man as rich as she was beautiful, and been heartbroken when he was killed in a polo accident shortly after Doris was born.

Time had apparently healed wounds enough for her to marry again — this time, an actor. Malone fumbled through his memory for his name, fi-

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nally found it. Robert Spencer. It seemed vaguely familiar to him, for some reason he couldn't quite place. That was when he ordered the third gin-and-beer.

Diana Dawn Stuart Spencer had been married only a few months when her second husband had vanished from the face of the earth. Not long after, Diana herself had jumped from the end of Navy Pier into the cold waters of Lake Michigan, leaving alone in the world a small blonde daughter who inherited the Stuart fortune, was raised by a board of trustees, and burst upon the world at eighteen as Doris Dawn, singer, determined on making her own way in the world.

Malone put down his empty glass, sighed, and felt in his pockets. Two nickels, two pennies and a telephone slug. He searched other pockets, not forgetting to investigate the lining of his coat and his trouser cuffs. Sometimes small change turned up unexpectedly. But not this time. He considered investing the two nickels in the slot machine, thought over the odds, and gave that up. He debated riding a street car to Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar and negotiating a small loan, then remembered Joe the Angel had gone to Gary, Indiana, to help celebrate a niece's wedding. He ended up by riding a State Street car to within a couple of blocks of 1117 Gay Street.

It was nearly midnight when he entered the tiny, perfect (though admittedly dusty) house Charles Stuart had built for his bride and left to his daughter, set in a small square of garden enclosed by a high brick wall. Less than half an hour later he was out in the garden with a spade he'd found in the back entry, shivering in the rain, and praying that he was on a fool's errand. Before one o'clock he was on the telephone in a frantic search for Capt. Dan von Flanagan, of the Homicide Squad. By one-fifteen von Flanagan was there having brought, per Malone's request, two husky policemen with shovels, the morgue wagon and a basket, and a bottle of gin.

"I thought it was a joke," Malone said hoarsely, nursing his glass of gin. "I found her diary right where she said it would be." He nodded toward the little Chippendale desk. "I started to read it."

"Shame on you, Malone," von Flanagan said. "Reading a girl's diary." The big policeman looked uncomfortable and uneasy, perched on the edge of a delicate brocade chair. "What does it say?"

"It was her idea," Malone said. "Anyway, I wanted to read her version of those two — suicide attempts. And this paper fell out of it." He handed it to von Flanagan.

Dig, dig, dig.
Under the willow tree in the garden.

"It sounded like a couple of lines from a couple of popular songs. But I found a spade, and I dug."

"You must have been drunk," von Flanagan commented.

"Who, me?" Malone asked indignantly. He gulped the rest of his glass of gin, took out a cigar and lit it with only a slightly trembling hand.

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"And don't be nervous," von Flanagan said. "You've seen skulls before."

"Who's nervous?" Malone demanded. He closed his eyes and remembered standing under a tree that dripped cold spring rain, bracing his feet in the mud and digging with a small and inadequate shovel into the still half-frozen ground, until suddenly a white and fleshless face leered at him. A nearby door opened, and he jumped.

A policeman in an oilskin slicker and muddy boots said, "We found a'most all of him, 'cept a little bit of his left foot." He closed the door as he went out, and Malone closed his eyes. He opened the door again and said, "Looks like he was buried with all his clothes on, even his jewelry. Johnson's cleaning off his watch." He closed the door again. Malone sneezed.

"I hope you haven't caught cold," von Flanagan said solicitously.

"I never catch cold," Malone said. He finally got the cigar lit, reached for the gin bottle and said, "But just to be on the safe side —" He sneezed again. "About the diary. It was written by a very happy, very normal young girl who had everything to live for, including about half the money in the world. Up to the point where strange things began to happen to her." He reached for the little leather-bound book and began to read aloud.

"*A strange thing happened. Everything is very mixed up and I don't understand. I made myself a nightcap and went to bed early after the show, and woke up in a hospital. In between I sort of remember a lot of excitement and people running around, and being very sick and uncomfortable. They tried to tell me I took poison, but I know I didn't. They said I wrote "Goodbye, goodbye" in lipstick on the head of my bed, but by the time they let me come home it had been washed off so I couldn't tell if I wrote it or not. They found poison in my stomach but I know I hadn't taken any.*"

"She *is* nuts," von Flanagan commented.

"Wait a minute," Malone said. He went on: "*I remember now that night there was a man in my room. He came to deliver a telegram only I never did see the telegram. I was in the bathtub so I put a robe on and opened the door a crack and told him to leave the telegram on the desk and shut the door when he went out. My nightcap was on the bed table. I wonder if someone is trying to poison me.*"

The little lawyer paused, refilled his glass, relit his cigar and said, "After that, there's a note of uneasiness in the diary. The usual things — dates, parties, clothes — but a feeling of worry.

Von Flanagan scowled and said, "I remember a little about that. Someone called her maid and told her to hurry home, her employer was sick. Otherwise this babe might of died, though she didn't take much."

"Some time later," Malone said, "she wrote, '*Someone is trying to kill me.*' " He paused. "You'll remember this, too. She was found in a hotel room, registered under another name. The maid came in and found her in the bathroom, with her wrists cut." He

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paused once more and added, frowning, "She checked in, and did the slashing job *just before* the maid was due in that room on her regular rounds."

"Stupid of her," von Flanagan commented, "if she really wanted to —" he cleared his throat, "check in and check out. She should have known she'd be found in time."

"According to her diary," Malone told him, "a man telephoned her and told her that if she'd go to such-and-such a hotel, and register under such-and-such a name, he'd meet her there with some very important information about the long-missing Robert Spencer. She went there, answered the door, 'a man'— otherwise unidentified — forced her into the bathroom, slashed her wrists, and left her there unconscious. She told the police this story, and they laughed at her. The words *Goodbye, goodbye* were written on the bathroom mirror."

Von Flanagan shuffled his feet uncomfortably and said, "You gotta admit, Malone, it smells phony."

Malone ignored him. "From that point on, the diary is the story of a terrified girl who knows someone is trying to kill her. And yet,"— he put down his cigar — "I'll read you the last entry."

"*I am terribly afraid, but I must know the truth. I have been promised that if I keep the appointment I will be told what happened to Robert Spencer. This, I must know.*"

Malone closed the little diary gently and said, "The slip of paper directing me — or someone — to dig in the garden, under the tree, was found between those two pages." He picked up the remains of his cigar, decided it was past all hope of relighting, and began to unwrap a new one.

"She took poison," he said, "but not quite enough to kill her, and her maid was summoned home in time to have her rushed to a hospital. She registered at a hotel under a phony name and slashed her wrists — not badly — just before the hotel maid was due to come in."

"What are you trying to prove?" von Flanagan asked uneasily.

"Nothing. Except that 'the man' must have known that ledge was safe enough to push a baby carriage on. He thought she'd use her head and climb back in through her window, though he made sure someone would see her and call the police before she did. He obviously didn't know she had an abnormal fear of heights that would keep her frozen there, too scared to move, and too sane to jump. Nor," he added modestly, "did he know that I'd arrive providentially."

"I don't know what you're getting at," von Flanagan said.

"Trouble is," Malone said, reaching for the gin bottle, "right now, neither do I."

Again the young policeman came to the door, even more mud on his boots and slicker. "We found a little of what's left of his clothes," he reported. "Looks like he's been there a *long* time. Got his wallet, his watch, and some other stuff. Looks like," he said, "he

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was some guy named Robert Spencer."

Malone lifted the gin bottle to his lips, and closed his eyes.

"It looks," the young policeman added, "like he might of been murdered. Anyway we found what must of been a bullet in what looks like it probably had been his stomach, once."

"Go away," Malone groaned. He put down the gin bottle and sneezed again.

"You're going to get pneumonia," von Flanagan said solicitously.

The little lawyer shook his head. "Not on my income."

"I better go back out," the young policeman said. "Johnson still thinks he can find the rest of that left foot." He slammed the door.

"Malone," von Flanagan said. "That note. Was it written in the same handwriting as the diary?"

Malone blew his nose and said "Yes," unhappily. That was one of the things that had been bothering him. Plus the fact that there was something maddeningly reminiscent about the wording of the note. "But," he added, "it wasn't written on the same paper. It was written on a telephone pad." If he could only remember —

At this point another young policeman came in the room and said, "There's someone here inquiring about Miss Dawn. I thought I'd better speak to you. He says his name is Robert Spencer."

Malone covered his eyes with his hand and said, "This is too much!"

Von Flanagan said, "By all means, send him in."

"By *all* means," Malone repeated. "Maybe he can help find what's left of his own left foot." He sneezed again. He downed another drink of gin. Then suddenly he remembered. Bob Spencer, actor. Appearing, right now, in a rather dreary and not too successful comedy. Robert Spencer had had a small son, parked somewhere with relatives, when he met and married Diana Dawn.

"There's someone with him," the policeman said. "A Mr. Apt."

"John Apt," Malone said. "He's an old-time theatrical agent. His friends call him Jack. Managed Diana Dawn, probably managed Robert Spencer. Manages Doris Dawn now. Maybe manages Bob Spencer, too — I don't know." He smothered the next sneeze.

Bob Spencer was tall, young, handsome, and anxious-eyed. His first words were, "Is Doris all right? What's been happening to her? Why are all these policemen at her house? Where is she? When can I see her?"

Jack Apt smiled at Malone, von Flanagan, and the young policeman. It was a friendly, ingratiating smile. He nodded a shoulder towards the young actor and said, "You pardon him, he is upset."

Nothing, Malone reflected, would ever upset Jack Apt. The diminutive agent had undoubtedly been born with a friendly smile and an imperturbable face and hadn't changed his expression in all his sixty-odd years. He had bright little eyes, a white, waxy skin, and a few wisps of silvery hair on his well-shaped skull. He wore

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a black Chesterfield that seemed too large for his tiny frame and carried, incredibly and appropriately, a black derby.

"I am greatly concerned," Jack Apt said. "I am the manager of Miss Dawn." He sat down on a straight-back chair and placed the derby neatly on his knees. "I would like your assurance, sir —"

"*Where is she?*" Bob Spencer demanded, his voice harsh with desperation.

"The young lady is quite safe," von Flanagan said coldly. "And what's it to you?"

"I'm in love with her," Bob Spencer said. "She's in love with me."

Malone looked at him and swallowed a sigh. He'd been cherishing a few very personal ideas about Doris Dawn. Now, he realized, he didn't have a chance.

"We're going to be married," Bob Spencer added.

The little lawyer sat up in surprise, but said nothing.

Jack Apt beamed. "Just like two little lovebirds. And then there will be no more difficulty about the money."

"Money?" Malone asked. It was one of his favorite subjects, right now more than ever.

"Never mind about the money," Bob Spencer said, "*Where is Doris?*"

"Never mind about Doris," Malone snapped, "*What* money?"

"Diana Dawn's will," Jack Apt explained. "She had a great deal of money. All of it from that unfortunate Mr. Stuart. She left it all to her second husband, Robert Spencer. Just before she died. Almost as though she had a premonition."

Malone scowled. "But Robert Spencer had disappeared before then."

"Quite right," Jack Apt said, nodding and smiling. "Therefore the will stated that until he was found, Doris Dawn would receive the income from the estate, and would have the use of this property for living purposes."

"'*Found*,'" Malone quoted. "Did it specify — dead or alive?"

"No," Jack Apt said. He looked very innocent and mild, turning his derby round and round on his knee. "A very curious will, I admit. But Diana wanted it that way. Robert had his faults, but she was fond of him. He stole from her, lied to her, almost ruined her career, but she was fond of him right up to the end." Suddenly he didn't look quite as innocent, nor as mild. "There is a clause — if her daughter should die, before he returned or was found, the money would go to his heirs. Or — if her daughter married, before he returned or was found, the money would go to the daughter and her husband. A very complicated will, but then, Diana Dawn had a very complicated personality."

Young Bob Spencer obviously couldn't stand this any longer. He said, "But this isn't finding Doris. And she hasn't married anybody, and *he* — hasn't been found."

Just at that moment one of the young policemen came in and said, "Johnson just found the rest of the left foot.

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Looks like we got all of him now."

"*Him?*" Bob Spencer asked wildly. He stared around the room. "Where — is — Doris?"

"Right here," Doris Dawn's voice said.

Malone jumped, and turned around.

"Hello, Malone," a deep, masculine voice said. "Sorry we startled you."

She was still very pale, but her face had been washed and freshly made up. Her honey blonde hair was smooth over her shoulders. She wore a nurse's uniform and white shoes and stockings but the dark mink coat was over the uniform.

Malone sneezed and said, "You're not here. You're in a hospital. You're an illusion. Go away. Vanish. *Scat!*"

Jerry Kane laughed.

"And *you*, Kane," Malone said, breathing hard. "How did you get in here?"

"We came in through the back door," Kane said. "Very easy, since it's our own house."

"Our —?" the little lawyer exploded.

He glared at Jerry Kane. The gambler, racketeer, night club owner, and promoter was a big, rangy, yet strangely graceful man. His tanned face could be hard as nails, or it could be ingratiatingly friendly and smiling, and it had an old scar down one cheek. His business deals had always kept him inside the law — but just inside. He owned the night club in which Doris Dawn sang. His reputation with women was worse than Malone's.

The other occupants of the room had been momentarily struck speechless. Now, everyone spoke at once. All questions. All the same questions.

"I discovered," Doris Dawn said, "I had to get out of that hospital. I *had* to. Because there was a chance to find out — something. It was very easy, really. I bribed a nurse to call Jerry. He bribed the policeman by my door to go away. And he brought me a nurse's uniform, and all I had to do was put it on and walk out."

"And," the big man said, "before coming here we drove across the state line and were married. Meet Mrs. Kane."

Young Bob Spencer cried, "Doris — !" in an anguished voice.

"You fool!" Jack Apt said.

She paid no attention. "This time, no one's going to stop me — finding out. It would be better, honestly, if you all just waited here for me." Suddenly a little gun flashed in her hand. "But don't try to stop me."

"Doris — baby —" Jerry Kane gasped. And then, "How the hell did you get my gun?"

"I took it out of your pocket," she said calmly. Her white little face was hard as ice. "If anyone tries to stop me or follow me, I'll shoot. No matter who. Even if it's Jerry, and I love Jerry. I always have." Suddenly she was gone.

Before anyone could move, little Jack Apt said, "Too bad you married her, Kane. Because she isn't going to inherit the money after all."

Kane swore bitterly and raced for the door. Suddenly everyone in the room was racing for the door. Malone caught up, out on the sidewalk, just as

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a car roared away down the street. Kane's car. With Doris driving. Other cars roared away. Bob Spencer's roadster. Two police cars.

The little lawyer stood shivering. They'd never catch up with that car of Kane's, not even the squad car would. And here he was stranded, and only he knew where she was going.

Not a taxi in sight. None nearer than Chicago Avenue.

Chicago Avenue — a sudden thought struck him, he wheeled around and sprinted down the street. One block to State Street, three blocks to Chicago Avenue. He made it to the safety zone just as an east bound streetcar came clanging through the rain.

"Wet night," the conductor commented.

"Going to be wetter," Malone prophesied gloomily. He dropped the remaining nickel in the coin box and began searching his pockets for an imaginary two pennies. The streetcar had reached the turn into Lakeshore Drive when Malone found the telephone slug, handed it triumphantly to the conductor for change and was properly surprised and crestfallen when it was returned to him. He continued to search for the pennies right up to the moment when the now empty streetcar came to an abrupt halt at the end of the line.

"Guess I'll have to put you off here," the conductor said. "No fare, no ride."

Malone glanced through the window, saw the familiar outlines of Navy Pier, and said, "Only the brave deserve the fair." He reached into his vest pocket and said, "Have a cigar."

Jerry Kane's custom-built convertible was parked at the entrance to the pier. There were no other cars in sight. Malone sighed. This was something he was going to have to handle by himself.

He knew exactly where to go. Up the stairs on the left-hand side of the pier, and along the promenade. Dark and deserted now, and desolate in the rain. There was one certain point, just beyond the line of benches — he stared ahead through the wet blackness and saw no sign of a girl in a nurse's uniform. He began to run.

He reached the spot from which Diana Dawn had leaped to her death, years before, and looked over the railing. There was a blob of white on the black water. Malone peeled off his overcoat, kicked off his shoes, and jumped.

The water was icy cold. He caught his breath after one terrible moment, and swam in the direction of the white blob.

She was alive. She was struggling against the water. That gave him new strength. He held her head up for a minute and, by some miracle, managed to rid her of the dark mink coat that was pulling her down.

A boat was coming. A tiny canoe, dark against the darkness. Malone aimed for it, helping her. An oar came out from the canoe, and pushed — down.

There was a brief agony of being underwater and an even briefer remembrance of all the things that had

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made living so much fun. An almost unbearable roaring in his ears as he rose to the surface still holding her. A light that almost blinded him as he breathed air again.

A voice said, "Catch 'em before they go down again." Strong hands reached out and caught him by the armpits. One quick motion, and he was hauled into the motor boat that had made the almost unbearable roaring and had flashed its light in his face.

He longed to collapse into unconsciousness there on the deck, but first — he looked, and saw that she had been hauled on board, and was breathing. Then he managed, with his last strength, to point at the canoe.

He heard a shot. He pulled himself up enough to look over the edge of the boat. He saw the canoe, overturned, starting to settle and sink.

"You might have known I'd commandeer a shore boat," Jerry Kane said. "I knew where she'd go. After all, I've been in love with her for a long time."

Malone lay back against the set boards, thought the whole thing over, and finally said, "You know, I think I am getting a cold after all."

In the emergency room on the pier, Lt. von Flanagan agreed that it was a shame young Bob Spencer — such a promising young actor, too — had perished in an attempt to rescue one of Chicago's favorite radio and stage entertainers, Miss Doris Dawn. Fortunately, Mr. Jerry Kane had come along in time to rescue Miss Dawn and Mr. John Joseph Malone, prominent Chicago attorney.

After the reporters and Doris Dawn and her new husband had gone, he said, "All right, Malone, what the hell happened?"

Malone snuggled into the blanket some kind soul had wrapped around him, sneezed, and said, "If Doris Dawn died, and the body of Robert Spencer were found, Robert Spencer's heir would inherit several million dollars. Bob Spencer, naturally, was the only heir. Being a young man of imagination, he decided it would be better for her to commit suicide than to be murdered in some ordinary way. There wouldn't be so many embarassing questions asked of the one person to benefit by her death."

He paused, sneezed twice, and went on, "But he also knew that it wasn't easy to make murder look like suicide. Especially to —" he paused again for a second or two — "very smart cops like von Flanagan here. Therefore, his prospective victim had to make several unsuccessful attempts at suicide." He sneezed once more. "My grandmother always said whiskey was the best thing to ward off a cold. Oh, thanks, pal. Very kind of you."

"I would of believed it," von Flanagan said slowly. "In fact, after those first coupla' tries — I mean, what looked like tries — if she'd of fell off that window ledge, with 'Goodbye, goodbye' wrote all over the mirrors, I'd of said suicide. And then when it looked like she jumped off of the pier, right at the place where her old lady jumped off years ago, after finding her

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step-pa's body and figuring out her old lady must of bumped him off and buried him there, and with her leaving a note saying right where he was—" He stopped, ran a handkerchief over his broad red face and said, "You know what I mean."

"I do," Malone said. "I know what you were supposed to think."

"But that note," von Flanagan said. "Why did she write it?"

"She didn't," Malone told him.

The police officer scowled. "It was in her handwriting. (Dig, dig, dig. And —under the willow tree in the garden.)"

"It was dictated to her," Malone said. He sighed, and added, "You're not up on popular songs, von Flanagan. You check this with her and see if I'm not right. The murderer telephoned her and recommended a couple of songs that would be particularly good for her style of singing. He told her to write down the titles and get copies. She did. Then on his next visit he tore the leaf from the telephone pad and stuck it in her diary. Remember, she trusted him, and he probably had the run of the house."

Von Flanagan shook his head sadly. "The things some people will do!" He scratched the back of his neck.

"Remember, he had to have the body found," Malone said, "or else he couldn't inherit. This would have looked like her last suicide note. It would have built up her reason for the suicide — her remorse for her mother's having committed a murder. That must have been preying on her mind for years. That's why she was willing to keep all these appointments, because she was told she'd find out the truth."

"And what was the truth?" von Flanagan asked. "Why did her old lady bump off this guy?"

There was a second or two of silence. "Because," Malone said at last, "from all I've been able to learn, he was a no good son-of-a-bee who was wrecking her life and her career, and who should have been murdered years before." He wondered if it would do him any serious damage to smoke a cigar, decided he might as well try, reached in his pocket and encountered a repulsive, soggy mass of wet tobacco.

"Have one of mine," Jack Apt said quietly.

It was a fine, Havana cigar. Malone accepted it with thanks, and privately wished it was one of his own favorite six-for-a-quarter brand.

"Only," von Flanagan said, "how did you know for sure she really hadn't meant to jump off that ledge?"

The little lawyer sneezed and sighed on the same breath, nearly strangling himself. "Because of the 'goodbye, goodbye,' written on the mirrors."

"I don't get it," von Flanagan said.

"You will," Malone told him, "if you'll think of Doris Dawn's coloring — and the color of lipstick that was used to write on the mirrors. No woman in her right mind would wear that shade with a skin like Doris's."

Von Flanagan rose and said admiringly, "I wish I knew how you find out such things."

"Even if I could trust you with the

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truth," Malone said, "you wouldn't believe it."

For a few minutes after von Flanagan had gone he sat hunched in his blankets, brooding. He'd found a murderer, he'd saved a life, he'd seen what looked like the beginning of a very happy marriage. But he still didn't have carfare home.

Suddenly Malone had enough of it — a bellyful. He turned and stared at Jack Apt. Apt stared back, uncomfortably. Then Malone said, "If I sit here much longer, I'll get double pneumonia and have to be shot full of penicillin. Besides, the whiskey's gone, this cigar stinks — come on, Apt, break down and spill the truth. Or shall I?"

Jack Apt said softly, "How did you know *I* murdered Robert Spencer?"

Malone sneezed again. "Cut it out, Apt. I may be all wet — but not in the brain. Add it up this way: you were Diana Dawn's manager. You must have been in love with her. Everyone who ever saw her was. You knew what he was doing to her — so you killed him. What you didn't know was that she loved him and that she would kill herself from anxiety over his disappearance."

"I killed him," Jack Apt said, "and I buried him. Young Bob Spencer wormed the truth about his burial place out of me. I didn't know the reason why he wanted to find it out. Perhaps you'd better call von Flanagan back here, and tell him."

Malone yawned and said, "von Flanagan gets on my nerves sometimes." He sneezed a double one this time. "It must have been hell for you all these years, after she killed herself. So why bring the cops in now?"

"It was hell," Jack Apt said, pulling on a pair of tan leather gloves. "It will continue to be. May I drive you anywhere, Malone?"

"No, thanks," Malone said. "I'll call a cab." He remembered his lack of cabfare. "Or maybe I'll walk."

The door opened and Maggie, his secretary, walked in. Her cheeks were pink and her eyes were blazing.

"I've been looking all over town for you. You owe me seven and a half hours overtime. That burglar has decided he will have you enter a not-guilty plea. He waited hours for you, and then sent his retainer over by messenger. All in cash."

"Call me a cab," Malone said, "before pneumonia carries me off."

"And," Maggie said, "A girl has been calling you for hours. She just said to tell you she's That Blonde."

Malone leaped up, blankets falling to the floor. "Call her back and tell her I'll be there as soon as I change my clothes."

"But Mr. Malone," Maggie wailed, "you'll catch cold."

The little lawyer paused at the door. "Who, me? I never catch cold." He waved, said a cheerful "Goodbye, goodbye," and walked out whistling "*The Willow Tree In The Garden*".

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Meet another eternal triangle: Henry Brownrigg (fascinating name!) is a small, plump, middle-aged chemist with over-dark, round, hot eyes; his wife, Millie Brownrigg, is a plump middle-aged woman of staggering obtuseness and placid dullness; Phyllis Bell is barely twenty with golden hair and blue eyes and a small, adorable mouth.

There is something else about Henry Brownrigg you should know: he is a man who has decided to become a widower. Only a foolish, fatuous wife stands in the way of Brownrigg's heart's desire . . . and decisive little Brownrigg is an expert chemist . . .

So far EQMM has brought you six Margery Allingham stories — all about Mr. Campion, Criminologist, and all previously unpublished in the United States. Here is the seventh "new" Allingham story, but this time it is not a Campion tale — although you may wish, before you have finished reading it, that Mr. Campion were somewhere around. Or, will you? We wonder . . .

THEY NEVER GET CAUGHT

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

"MILLIE DEAR, this does explain itself, doesn't it, Henry?" Mr. Henry Brownrigg signed his name on the back of the little blue bill with a flourish. Then he set the scrap of paper carefully in the exact centre of the imperfectly scoured developing bath, and leaving the offending utensil on the kitchen table for his wife to find when she came in, he stalked back to the shop, feeling that he had administered the rebuke surely and at the same time gracefully.

In fifteen years Mr. Brownrigg felt that he had mastered the art of teaching his wife her job. Not that he had taught her. That, Mr. Brownrigg felt, with a woman of Millie's staggering obtuseness, was past praying for. But now, after long practice, he could deliver the snub or administer the punishing word in a way which would penetrate her placid dullness.

Within half an hour after she had returned from shopping and before lunch was set upon the table, he knew the bath would be back in the darkroom, bright and pristine as when it was new, and nothing more would be said about it. Millie would be a little more ineffectually anxious to please at lunch, perhaps, but that was all.

Mr. Brownrigg passed behind the counter and flicked a speck of dust off the dummy cartons of face-cream. It was twelve twenty-five and a half. In four and a half minutes Phyllis Bell would leave her office further down

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the High Street, and in seven and a half minutes she would come in through that narrow, sunlit doorway to the cool, drug-scented shop.

On that patch of floor where the sunlight lay blue and yellow, since it had found its way in through the enormous glass vases in the window which were the emblem of his trade, she would stand and look at him, her blue eyes limpid and her small mouth pursed and adorable.

The chemist took up one of the ebony-backed hand mirrors exposed on the counter for sale and glanced at himself in it. He was not altogether a prepossessing person. Never a tall man, at forty-two his wide, stocky figure showed a definite tendency to become fleshy, but there was strength and virility in his thick shoulders, while his clean-shaven face and broad neck were short and bull-like and his lips were full.

Phyllis liked his eyes. They held her, she said, and most of the other young women who bought their cosmetics at the corner shop and chatted with Mr. Brownrigg across the counter might have been inclined to agree with her.

Over-dark, round, hot eyes had Mr. Brownrigg; not at all the sort of eyes for a little, plump, middle-aged chemist with a placid wife like Millie.

But Mr. Brownrigg did not contemplate his own eyes. He smoothed his hair, wiped his lips, and then, realizing that Phyllis was almost due, he disappeared behind the dispensing desk. It was as well, he always thought, not to appear too eager.

He was watching the door, though, when she came in. He saw the flicker of her green skirt as she hesitated on the step and saw her half-eager, half-apprehensive expression as she glanced towards the counter.

He was glad she had not come in when a customer was there. Phyllis was different from any of the others whose little histories stretched back through the past fourteen years. When Phyllis was in the shop Mr. Brownrigg found he was liable to make mistakes, liable to drop things and fluff the change.

He came out from his obscurity eager in spite of himself, and drew the little golden-haired girl sharply towards him over that part of the counter which was lowest and which he purposely kept uncluttered.

He kissed her and the sudden hungry force of the movement betrayed him utterly. He heard her quick intake of breath before she released herself and stepped back.

"You — you shouldn't," she said, nervously tugging her hat back into position.

She was barely twenty, small and young-looking for her years, with yellow hair and a pleasant, quiet style. Her blue eyes were frightened and a little disgusted now, as though she found herself caught up in an emotion which her instincts considered not quite nice.

Henry Brownrigg recognized the expression. He had seen it before in other eyes, but whereas on past occasions he had been able to be tolerantly

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amused and therefore comforting and glibly reassuring, in Phyllis it irritated and almost frightened him.

"Why not?" he demanded sharply, too sharply he knew immediately, and the blood rushed into his face.

Phyllis took a deep breath.

"I came to tell you," she said jerkily, like a child saying its piece, "I've been thinking things over. I can't go on with all this. You're married. I want to be married some day. I — I shan't come in again."

"You haven't been talking to someone?" he demanded, suddenly cold.

"About you? Good heavens, no!"

Her vehemence was convincing, and because of that he shut his mind to its uncomplimentary inference and experienced only relief.

"You love me," said Henry Brownrigg. "I love you and you love me. You know that."

He spoke without intentional histrionics, but adopted a curious monotone which, some actors have discovered, is one of the most convincing methods of conveying deep sincerity.

Phyllis nodded miserably and then seemed oddly embarrassed. Wistfully her eyes wandered to the sunlit street and back again.

"Good-bye," she said huskily and fled.

He saw her speeding past the window, almost running.

For some time Henry Brownrigg remained looking down at the patch of blue sunlight where she had stood. Finally he raised his eyes and smiled with conscious wryness. She would come back. Tomorrow, or in a week, or in ten days perhaps, she would come back. But the obstacle, the insurmountable obstacle would arise again, in time it would defeat him and he would lose her.

Phyllis was different from the others. He would lose her. Unless that obstacle were removed.

Henry Brownrigg frowned.

There were other considerations too. The old, mottled ledger told those only too clearly.

If the obstacle were removed it would automatically wipe away those difficulties also, for was there not the insurance and that small income Millie's father had left so securely tied, as though the old man had divined his daughter would grow up a fool?

Mr. Brownrigg's eyes rested upon the little drawer under the counter marked: "Prescriptions: private." It was locked and not even young Perry, his errand boy and general assistant, who poked his nose into most things, guessed that under the pile of slips within was a packet of letters scrawled in Phyllis's childish hand.

He turned away abruptly. His breath was hard to draw and he was trembling. The time had come.

Some months previously Henry Brownrigg had decided that he must become a widower before the end of the year, but the interview of the morning had convinced him that he must hurry.

At this moment Millie, her face still pink with shame at the recollection of the affair of the ill-washed bath, put

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her head round the inner door.

"Lunch is on the table, Henry," she said, and added with that stupidity which had annoyed him ever since it had ceased to please him by making him feel superior: "Well, you do look serious. Oh, Henry, you haven't made a mistake and given somebody a wrong bottle?"

"No, my dear Millie," said her husband, surveying her coldly and speaking with heavy sarcasm. "That is the peculiar sort of idiot mistake I have yet to make. I haven't reached my wife's level yet."

And as he followed her uncomplaining figure to the little room behind the shop a word echoed rhythmically in the back of his mind and kept time with the beating of his heart. "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!"

"Henry, dear," said Millie Brownrigg, turning a troubled face towards her husband, "why Doctor Crupiner? He's so expensive and so old."

She was standing in front of the dressing table in the big front bedroom above the shop, brushing her brown, grey-streaked hair before she plaited it and coiled it round her head.

Henry Brownrigg, lying awake in his bed on the far side of the room, did not answer her.

Millie went on talking. She was used to Henry's silence. Henry was so clever. Most of his time was spent in thought.

"I've heard all sorts of odd things about Doctor Crupiner," she remarked. "They say he's so old he forgets. Why shouldn't we go to Mother's man? She swears by him."

"Unfortunately for your mother she has your intelligence, without a man to look after her, poor woman," said Henry Brownrigg.

Millie made no comment.

"Crupiner," continued Henry Brownrigg, "may not be much good as a general practitioner, but there is one subject on which he is a master. I want him to see you. I want to get you well, old dear."

Millie's gentle, expressionless face flushed and her blue eyes looked moist and foolish in the mirror. Henry could see her reflection in the glass and he turned away. There were moments when, by her obvious gratitude for a kind word from him, Millie made him feel a certain distaste for his project. He wished to God she would go away and leave him his last few moments in bed to think of Phyllis in peace.

"You know, Henry," said Mrs. Brownrigg suddenly, "I don't feel ill. Those things you're giving me are doing me good, I'm sure. I don't feel nearly so tired at the end of the day now. Can't you treat me yourself?"

The man in the bed stiffened. Any compunction he may have felt vanished and he became wary.

"Of course they're doing you good," he said with the satisfaction of knowing that he was telling the truth up to a point, or at least of knowing that he was doing nothing reprehensible — yet.

"I don't believe in patent medicines as a rule, but Fender's pills are good.

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They're a well-known formula, and they certainly do pick one up. But I just want to make sure that you're organically sound. I don't like you getting breathless when you hurry, and the color of your lips isn't good."

Plump, foolish Millie looked in the mirror and nervously ran her forefinger over her mouth.

Like many women of her age she had lost much of her color, and there certainly was a faint, very faint, blue streak round the edge of her lips.

The chemist was heavily reassuring.

"Nothing to worry about, I'm sure, but I think we'll go down and see Crupiner this evening," he said, and added adroitly: "We want to be on the safe side, don't we?"

Millie nodded, her mouth trembling.

"Yes, dear," she said, and paused, adding afterwards in that insufferable way of hers: "I suppose so."

When she had gone downstairs to attend to breakfast Henry Brownrigg rose with his own last phrase still on his lips. He repeated it thoughtfully.

"The safe side." That was right. The safe side. No ghastly hash of it for Henry Brownrigg.

Only fools made a hash of things. Only fools got caught. This was almost too easy. Millie was so simple-minded, so utterly unsuspecting.

By the end of the day Mr. Brownrigg was nervy. The boy Perry had reported, innocently enough, that he had seen young Hill in his new car going down Acacia Road at something over sixty, and had added casually that he had had the Bell girl with him. The youngest one. Phyllis. Did Mr. Brownrigg remember her? She was rather pretty.

For a moment Henry Brownrigg was in terror lest the boy had discovered his secret and was wounding him maliciously. But having convinced himself that this was not so, the fact and the sting remained.

Young Hill was handsome and a bachelor. Phyllis was young and impressionable. The chemist imagined them pulling up in some shady copse outside the town, holding hands, perhaps even kissing, and the heart which could remain steady while Millie's stupid eyes met his anxiously as she spoke of her illness turned over painfully in Henry Brownrigg's side at the thought of that embrace.

"Hurry." The word formed itself again in the back of his mind. Hurry . . . hurry.

Millie was breathless when they arrived at Doctor Crupiner's old-fashioned house. Henry had been self-absorbed and had walked very fast.

Doctor Crupiner saw them immediately. He was a vast, dusty old man. Privately Millie thought she would like to take a good stiff broom to him, and the picture the idea conjured in her mind was so ridiculous that she giggled nervously and Henry had to shake his head at her warningly.

She flushed painfully, and the old, stupid expression settled down over her face again.

Henry explained her symptoms to the doctor and Millie looked surprised and gratified at the anxiety he be-

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trayed. Henry had evidently noticed her little wearinesses much more often than she had supposed.

When he had finished his recital of her small ills, none of them alarming in themselves but piling up in total to a rather terrifying sum of evidence, Doctor Crupiner turned his eyes, which were small and greasy, with red veins in their whites, on to Millie, and his old lips, which were mottled like Henry's ledger, moved for a fraction of a second before his voice came, wheezy and sepulchral.

"Well, madam," he said, "your husband here seems worried about you. Let's have a look at you."

Millie trembled. She was getting breathless again from sheer apprehension. Once or twice lately it had occurred to her that the Fender's pills made her feel breathless, even while they bucked her up in other ways, but she had not liked to mention this to Henry.

Doctor Crupiner came close to her, breathing heavily through his nose in an effort of concentration. He thrust a stubby, unsteady finger into her eye-socket, dragging down the skin so that he could peer short-sightedly at her eyeball. He thumped her half-heartedly on the back and felt the palms of her hands.

Mr. Brownrigg, who watched all this somewhat meaningless ritual, his round eyes thoughtful and uneasy, suddenly took the doctor to one side, and the two men had a muttered conversation at the far end of the room.

Millie could not help overhearing some of it, because Doctor Crupiner was deaf these days and Henry was anxious to make himself understood.

"Twenty years ago," she heard. "Very sudden." And then, after a pause, the awful word "hereditary."

Millie's trembling fit increased in intensity and her broad, stupid face looked frightened. They were talking about her poor papa. He had died very suddenly of heart disease.

Her own heart jumped painfully. So that was why Henry seemed so anxious.

Doctor Crupiner came back to her. She had to undo her dress and Doctor Crupiner listened to her heart with an ancient stethoscope. Millie, already trembling, began to breathe with difficulty as her alarm became unbearable.

At last the old man finished with her. He stared at her unwinkingly for some seconds and finally turned to Henry, and together they went back to the far end of the room.

Millie strained her ears and heard the old man's rumbling voice.

"A certain irregularity. Nothing very alarming. Bring her to see me again."

Then there was a question from Henry which she could not catch, but afterwards, as the doctor seemed to be fumbling in his mind for a reply, the chemist remarked in an ordinary tone: "I've been giving her Fender's pills."

"Fender's pills?" Doctor Crupiner echoed the words with relief. "Excellent. Excellent. You chemists like patent medicines, I know, and I don't want to encourage you, but that's a

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well-known formula and will save you mixing up my prescription. Carry on with those for a while. Very good things; I often recommend them. Take them in moderation, of course."

"Oh, of course," said Henry. "But do you think I'm doing right, Doctor?"

Millie looked pleased and startled at the earnestness of Henry's tone.

"Oh, without doubt, Mr. Brownrigg, without doubt." Doctor Crupiner repeated the words again as he came back to Millie. "There, Mrs. Brownrigg," he said with spurious jollity, "you take care of yourself and do what your husband says. Come to see me again in a week or so and you'll be as right as ninepence. Off you go. Oh, but Mrs. Brownrigg, no shocks, mind. No excitements. No little upsets. And don't overtire yourself."

He shook hands perfunctorily, and while Henry was helping Millie to collect her things with a solicitude quite unusual in him, the old man took down a large, dusty book from the shelves.

Just before they left he peered at Henry over his spectacles.

"Those Fender's pills are quite a good idea," he remarked in a tone quite different from his professional rumble. "Just the things. They contain a small percentage of *digitalin*."

One of Mr. Brownrigg's least attractive habits was his method of spending Saturday nights.

At half-past seven the patient but silently disapproving Millie would clear away the remains of the final meal of the day and place one glass and an unopened bottle of whisky and a siphon of soda on the green serge tablecloth.

This done, she would retire to the kitchen, wash up, and complete the week's ironing. She usually left this job until then, because it was a longish business, with frequent pauses for minor repairs to Henry's shirts and her own underclothing, and she knew she had plenty of undisturbed time on her hands.

She had, in fact, until midnight. When the kitchen clock wheezed twelve Millie folded her ironing board and turned up the irons on the stove to cool.

Then she went into the living-room and took away the glass and the empty bottle, so that the daily help should not see them in the morning. She also picked up the papers and straightened the room.

Finally, when the gas fire had been extinguished, she attended to Henry.

A fortnight and three days after her first visit to Doctor Crupiner — the doctor, at Henry's suggestion, had increased her dose of Fender's pills from three to five a day — she went through her Saturday ritual as usual.

For a man engaged in Mr. Brownrigg's particular program to get hopelessly and incapably drunk once, much less once a week, might well have been suicidal lunacy.

One small glass of whisky reduced him to taciturnity. Twelve large glasses of whisky, or one bottle, made of him a limp, silent sack of humanity,

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incapable of movement or speech, but, quite remarkably, not a senseless creature.

It might well have occurred to Millie to wonder why her husband should choose to transform himself into a Thérèse Raquin paralytic once every week in his life, but in spite of her awful stupidity she was a tolerant woman and honestly believed that men were odd, privileged creatures who took delight in strange perversions. So she humored him and kept his weakness secret even from her mother.

Oddly enough, Henry Brownrigg enjoyed his periodical orgy. He did not drink during the week, and his Saturday experience was at once an adventure and a habit. At the outset of his present project he had thought of foregoing it until his plan was completed, but he realized the absolute necessity of adhering rigidly to his normal course of life, so that there could be no hook, however small, on which the garment of suspicion could catch and take hold.

On this particular evening Millie quite exhausted herself getting him upstairs and into bed. She was so tired when it was all over that she sat on the edge of her couch and breathed hard, quite unable to pull herself together sufficiently to undress.

So exhausted was she that she forgot to take the two Fender's pills that Henry had left on the dressing table for her, and once in bed she could not persuade herself to get out again for them.

In the morning Henry found them still in the little box. He listened to her startled explanations in silence and then, as she added apology to apology, suddenly became himself again.

"Dear Millie," he said in the old exasperated tone she knew so well, "isn't it enough for me to do all I can to get you well without you hampering me at every turn?"

Millie bent low over the stove and, as if he felt she might be hiding sudden tears, his manner became more conciliatory.

"Don't you like them?" he inquired softly. "Don't you like the taste of them? Perhaps they're too big? Look here, old dear, I'll put them up in an easier form. You shall have them in jelly cases. Leave it to me. There, there, don't worry. But you must take your medicine, you know."

He patted her plump shoulder awkwardly and hurried upstairs to dress.

Millie became thoughtful. Henry was clearly very worried about her indeed, or he would never be so nice about her silly mistake.

Young Bill Perry, Brownrigg's errand-boy assistant, was at the awkward stage, if indeed he would ever grow out of it.

He was scrawny, red-headed, with a tendency to acne, and great raw, scarlet wrists. Mr. Brownrigg he loathed as only the young can loathe the possessor of a sarcastic tongue, but Millie he liked, and his pale eyes twinkled kindly when she spoke to him.

Young Perry did not think Millie was half so daft as the Old Man made

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her out to be on many occasions.

If only because she was kind to him, young Perry was interested in the state of Millie's health.

On the Monday night young Perry saw Mr. Brownrigg putting up the contents of the Fender's pills in jelly cases and he inquired about them.

Mr. Brownrigg was unusually communicative. He told young Perry in strict confidence that Mrs. Brownrigg was far from well and that Doctor Crupiner was worried about her.

Mr. Brownrigg also intimated that he and Doctor Crupiner were, as professional men, agreed that if complete freedom from care and Fender's pills could not save Mrs. Brownrigg, nothing could.

"Do you mean she might die?" said young Perry, aghast. "Suddenly, I mean, sir?"

He was sorry as soon as he had spoken, because Mr. Brownrigg's hand trembled so much that he dropped one of the jelly cases and young Perry realized that the Old Man was really wild about the Old Girl after all, and that his bullyragging her was all a sham to hide his feelings.

At that moment young Perry's sentimental, impressionable heart went out to Mr. Brownrigg, and he generously forgave him for his observation that young Perry was patently cut out for the diplomatic service, since his tact and delicacy were so great.

The stores arrived. Bill Perry unpacked the two big cases; the smaller case he opened, but left the unpacking to his employer.

Mr. Brownrigg finished his pill-making, although he was keeping the boy waiting, rinsed his hands and got down to work with his usual deliberation.

There were not a great many packages in the case and young Perry, who had taken a peep at the mottled ledger some time before, thought he knew why. The Old Man was riding close to the edge. Bills and receipts had to be juggled very carefully these days.

The boy read the invoice from the wholesalers', and Mr. Brownrigg put the drugs away.

"*Sodii Bicarbonas, Magnesia Levis,*" he read, stumbling over the difficult words. "*Iodine, Quininæ Hydrochloridum, Tincture Digitalin* . . . that must be it, Mr. Brownrigg. There, in the biggish packet."

Bill Perry knew he read badly and was only trying to be helpful when he indicated the parcel, but Mr. Brownrigg shot a truly terrifying glance in his direction as he literally snatched up the package and carried it off to the drug cabinet.

Young Perry was dismayed. He was late and he wanted to go. In his panic he floundered on, making matters worse.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "I was only trying to help. I thought you might be — er — thinking of something else and got a bit muddled."

"Oh," said Mr. Brownrigg slowly, fixing him with those hot, round eyes in a way which was oddly disturbing. "And of what should I be thinking when I am doing my work, boy?"

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"Of — of Mrs. Brownrigg, sir," stammered the wretched Perry helplessly.

Henry Brownrigg froze. The blood congealed in his face and his eyes seemed to sink into his head.

Young Perry, who realized he had said the wrong thing, and who had a natural delicacy which revolted at prying into another's sorrow, mistook his employer's symptoms for acute embarrassment.

"I'm sorry," he said again. "I was really trying to help. I'm a bit — er — windy myself, sir. Mrs. Brownrigg's been very kind to me. I'm sorry she's so ill."

A great sigh escaped Henry Brownrigg.

"That's all right, my boy," he said, with a gentleness his assistant had never before heard in his tone. "I'm a bit rattled myself, too. You can go now. I'll see to these few things."

Young Perry sped off, happy to be free on such a sunny evening, but also a little awe-stricken by the revelation of this tragedy of married love.

Phyllis hurried down Coe's Lane, which was a short cut between her own road and Priory Avenue. It was a narrow, paper-baggy little thoroughfare, with a dusty hedge on one side and a high tarred fence on the other.

On this occasion Coe's Lane appeared to be deserted, but when Phyllis reached the stunted may-tree halfway down the hedge a figure stepped out and came to meet her.

The girl stopped abruptly in the middle of the path. Her cheeks were patched with pink and white and she caught her breath sharply as though afraid of herself.

Henry Brownrigg himself was unprepared for the savagery of the sudden pain in his breast when he saw her, and the writhing, vicious, mindless passion which checked his breathing and made his eyelids feel sticky and his mouth dry, frightened him a little.

They were alone in the lane and he kissed her, putting into his hunched shoulders and greedy lips all the insufferable, senseless longing of the past eighteen days.

When he released her she was crying.

"Go away," she said and her tone was husky and imploring. "Oh, go away — please, please!"

After the kiss Henry Brownrigg was human again and no longer the fiend-possessed soul in torment he had been while waiting in the lane. Now he could behave normally, for a time at least.

"All right," he said, and added so lightly that she was deceived, "going out with Peter Hill again this afternoon?"

The girl's lips trembled and her eyes were pleading.

"I'm trying to get free," she said. "Don't you see I'm trying to get free from you? It's not easy."

Henry Brownrigg stared at her inquisitively for a full minute. Then he laughed shortly and explosively and strode away back down the lane.

Henry Brownrigg went home. He

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walked very fast, his round eyes introspective but his step light and purposeful. His thoughts were pleasant. So Phyllis was there when he wanted her, there for the taking when the obstacle was once removed. That had been his only doubt. Now he was certain of it. The practical part of his project alone remained.

Small, relatively unimportant things like the new story the mottled ledger would have to tell when the insurance money was in the bank and Millie's small income was realized and reinvested crowded into his mind, but he brushed them aside impatiently. This afternoon he must be grimly practical. There was delicate work to do.

When he reached home Millie had gone over to her mother's.

It was also early-closing day and young Perry was far away, bowling for the St. Anne's parish cricket club.

Mr. Brownrigg went round the house carefully and made sure that all the doors were locked. The shop shutters were up too, and he knew from careful observation that they permitted no light from within to escape.

He removed his jacket and donned his working overalls, switched on the lights, locked the door between the shop and the living-room, and set to work.

He knew exactly what he had to do. Millie had been taking five Fender's pills regularly now for eight days. Each pill contained $\frac{1}{16}$ gr. *Nativelle's Digitalin*, and the stuff was cumulative. No wonder she had been complaining of biliousness and headaches lately! Millie was a hopeless fool.

He took out the bottle of *Tincturæ Digitalin*, which had come when young Perry had given him such a scare. The wholesalers couldn't possibly notice anything unusual in his order. There could be no inquiry: it meant he need never worry — afterwards.

He worked feverishly as his thoughts raced on. He knew the dose. All that had been worked out months before when the idea had first occurred to him, and he had gone over this part of the proceedings again and again in his mind so that there could be no mistake.

Nine drachms of the tincture had killed a patient with no *digitalin* already in the system. But then the tincture was notoriously liable to deteriorate. Still, this stuff was fresh; barely six days old, if the wholesalers could be trusted.

He prepared his burner and the evaporator. It took a long time. Although he was so practised, his hands were unsteady and clumsy, and the irritant fumes got into his eyes.

Suddenly he discovered that it was nearly four o'clock. He was panic-stricken. Only two hours and Millie would come back, and there was a lot to be done.

As the burner did its work his mind moved rapidly. *Digitalin* was so difficult to trace afterwards; that was the beauty of it. Even the great Tardieu had been unable to state positively if it was *digitalin* that had been used in the Pommeraise case, and that after the most exhaustive P.M. and tests on frogs and all that sort of thing.

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Henry Brownrigg's face split into the semblance of a smile. Old Crupiner was no Tardieu. Crupiner would not advise a P.M. if he could possibly avoid it. He'd give the certificate all right; his mind was prepared for it. Probably he wouldn't even come and look at the body.

A shattering peal on the back door startled him so much that he nearly upset his paraphernalia. For a moment he stood breathing wildly, like a trapped animal, but he pulled himself together in the end, and, changing into his coat, went down to answer the summons.

He locked the shop door behind him, smoothed his hair, and opened the back door, confident that he looked normal, even ordinary.

But the small boy with the evening paper did not wait for his Saturday's sixpence but rushed away after a single glance at Mr. Brownrigg's face. He was a timid twelve-year-old, however, who often imagined things, and his employer, an older boy, cuffed him for the story and made a mental note to call for the money himself on the Monday night.

The effect of the incident on Henry Brownrigg was considerable. He went back to his work like a man in a nightmare, and for the rest of the proceedings he kept his mind resolutely on the physical task.

At last it was done.

He turned out the burner, scoured the evaporator, measured the toxic dose carefully, adding to it considerably to be on the safe side. After all, one could hardly overdo it; that was the charm of this stuff.

Then he effectively disposed of the residue and felt much better.

He had locked the door and changed his coat again before he noticed the awful thing. A layer of fine dust on the top of one of the bottles first attracted his attention. He removed it with fastidious care. He hated a frowzy shop.

He had replaced his handkerchief before he saw the showcase ledge and the first glimmering of the dreadful truth percolated his startled mind.

From the ledge his eyes travelled to the counter-top, to the dummy cartons, to the bottles and jars, to the window shutters, to the very floor.

Great drops appeared on Henry Brownrigg's forehead. There was not an inch of surface in the whole shop that was innocent of the thinnest, faintest coat of yellowish dust.

Digitalin! Digitalin over the whole shop. *Digitalin* over the whole world! The evidence of his guilt everywhere, damning, inescapable, clear to the first intelligent observer.

Henry Brownrigg stood very still.

Gradually his brain, cool at the bidding of the instinct of self-preservation, began to work again. Delay. That was the all-important note. Millie must not take the capsule tonight as he had planned. Not tonight, nor tomorrow. Millie must not die until every trace of that yellow dust had been driven from the shop.

Swiftly he rearranged his plan. Tonight he must behave as usual and to-

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morrow, when Millie went to church, he must clear off the worst of the stuff before young Perry noticed anything.

Then on Monday he would make an excuse and have the vacuum-cleaning people in. They came with a great machine and put pipes in through the window. He had often said he would have it done.

They worked quickly; so on Tuesday . . .

Meanwhile, normality. That was the main thing. He must do nothing to alarm Millie or excite her curiosity.

It did not occur to him that there would be a grim irony in getting Millie to help him dust the shop that evening. But he dismissed the idea. They'd never do it thoroughly in the time.

He washed in the kitchen and went back into the hall. A step on the stairs above him brought a scream to his throat which he only just succeeded in stifling.

It was Millie. She had come in the back way without him hearing her, heaven knew how long before.

"I've borrowed a curtain from Mother for your bedroom door, Henry," she said mildly. "You won't be troubled by the draft up there any more. It's such a good thick one. I've just been fixing it up."

Henry Brownrigg made a noise which might have meant anything. His nerves had gone to pieces.

Her next remark was reassuring, however; so reassuring that he almost laughed aloud.

"Oh, Henry," she said, "you only gave me four of those pills today, dear. You won't forget the other one, will you?"

"Cold ham from the cooked meat shop, cold tinned peas, potato salad and Worcester sauce. What a cook I've married, my dear Millie."

Henry Brownrigg derived a vicious pleasure from the clumsy sarcasm, and when Millie's pale face became wooden he was gratified.

As he sat at the small table and looked at her he was aware of a curious phenomenon. The woman stood out from the rest of the room's contents as though she alone was in relief. He saw every line of her features, every fold of her dark cotton foulard dress, as though they were drawn with a thick black pencil.

Millie was silent. Even her usual flow of banality had dried up, and he was glad of it.

He found himself regarding her dispassionately, as though she had been a stranger. He did not hate her, he decided. On the contrary, he was prepared to believe that she was quite an estimable, practicable person in her own limited fashion. But she was in the way.

This plump, fatuous creature, not even different in her very obtuseness from many of the other matrons in the town, had committed the crowning impudence of getting in the way of Henry Brownrigg. She, this ridiculous, lowly woman, actually stood between Henry Brownrigg and the inmost desires of his heart.

It was an insight into the state of

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the chemist's mind that at that moment nothing impressed him so forcibly as her remarkable audacity.

Monday, he thought. Monday, and possibly Tuesday, and then . . .

Millie cleared away.

Mr. Brownrigg drank his first glass of whisky and soda with a relish he did not often experience. For him the pleasure of his Saturday night libations lay in the odd sensation he experienced when really drunk.

When Henry Brownrigg was a sack of limp, uninviting humanity to his wife and the rest of the world, to himself he was a quiet, all-powerful ghost, seated, comfortable and protected, in the shell of his body, able to see and comprehend everything, but too mighty and too important to direct any of the drivelling little matters which made up his immediate world.

On these occasions Henry Brownrigg tasted godhead.

The evening began like all the others, and by the time there was but an inch of amber elixir in the square bottle, Millie and the dust in the shop and Doctor Crupiner had become in his mind as ants and ant burdens, while he towered above them, a colossus in mind and power.

When the final inch had dwindled to a yellow stain in the bottom of the white glass bottle Mr. Brownrigg sat very still. In a few minutes now he would attain the peak of that ascendancy over his fellow-mortals when the body, so important to them, was for him literally nothing; not even a dull encumbrance, not even a nerveless covering but a nothingless, an unimportant, unnoticed element.

When Millie came in at last a pin could have been thrust deep into Mr. Brownrigg's flesh and he would not have noticed it.

It was when he was in bed, his useless body clad in clean pajamas, that he noticed that Millie was not behaving quite as usual. She had folded his clothes neatly on the chair at the end of the bed when he saw her peering at something intently.

He followed her eyes and saw for the first time the new curtain. It certainly was a fine affair, a great, thick, heavy plush thing that looked as though it would stop any draft there ever had been.

He remembered clearly losing his temper with Millie in front of young Perry one day, and, searching in his mind for a suitable excuse, had invented this draft beneath his bedroom door. And there wasn't one, his ghost remembered; that was the beauty of it. The door fitted tightly in the jamb. But it gave Millie something to worry about.

Millie went out of the room without extinguishing the lights. He tried to call out to her and only then realized the disadvantages of being a disembodied spirit. He could not speak, of course.

He was lying puzzled at this obvious flaw in his omnipotence when he heard her go downstairs instead of crossing into her room. He was suddenly furious and would have risen, had it been possible. But in the midst

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of his anger he remembered something amusing and lay still, inwardly convulsed with secret laughter.

Soon Millie would be dead. Dead — dead — dead!

Millie would be stupid no longer. Millie would appal him by her awful mindlessness no more. Millie would be dead.

She came up again and stepped softly into the room.

The alcohol was beginning to take its full effect now and he could not move his head. Soon oblivion would come and he would leave his body and rush off into the exciting darkness.

He saw only Millie's head and shoulders when she came into his line of vision. He was annoyed. She still had those thick black lines round her, and there was an absorbed expression upon her face which he remembered seeing before when she was engrossed in some particularly difficult household task.

She switched out the light and then went over to the far window. He was interested now, and saw her pull up the blinds.

Then to his astonishment he heard the crackle of paper; not an ordinary crackle, but something familiar, something he had heard hundreds of times before.

He placed it suddenly. Sticky paper. His own reel of sticky paper from the shop.

He was so cross with her for touching it that for some moments he did not wonder what she was doing with it, and it was not until he saw her silhouetted against the second row of panes that he guessed. She was sticking up the window cracks.

His ghost laughed again. The draft! Silly, stupid Millie trying to stop the draft.

She pulled down the blinds and turned on the light again. Her face was mild and expressionless as ever, her blue eyes vacant and foolish.

He saw her go to the dressingtable, still moving briskly, as she always did when working about the house.

Once again the phenomenon he had noticed at the evening meal became startlingly apparent. He saw her hand and its contents, positively glowing because of its black outline, thrown up in high relief against the white tablecover.

Millie was putting two pieces of paper there: one white with a deckle edge, one blue and familiar.

Henry Brownrigg's ghost yammered in its prison. His body ceased to be negligible: it became a coffin, a sealed, leaden coffin suffocating him in its senseless shell. He fought to free himself, to stir that mighty weight, to move.

Millie knew.

The white paper with the deckle edge was a letter from Phyllis out of the drawer in the shop, and the blue paper — he remembered it now — the blue paper he had left in the dirty developing bath.

He re-read his own pencilled words as clearly as if his eye had become possessed of telescopic sight:

"*Millie dear, this does explain itself,*

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doesn't it?"

And then his name, signed with a flourish. He had been so pleased with himself when he had written it.

He fought wildly. The coffin was made of glass now, thick, heavy glass which would not respond to his greatest effort.

Millie was hesitating. She had picked up Phyllis's letter. Now she was reading it again.

He saw her frown and tear the paper into shreds, thrusting the pieces into the pocket of her cardigan.

Henry Brownrigg, understood. Millie was sorry for Phyllis. For all her obtuseness she had guessed at some of the girl's piteous infatuation and had decided to keep her out of it.

What then? Henry Brownrigg writhed inside his inanimate body.

Millie was back at the table now. She was putting something else there. What was it? Oh, what was it?

The ledger! He saw it plainly, the old mottled ledger, whose story was plain for any fool coroner to read and misunderstand.

Millie had turned away now. He hardly noticed her pause before the fireplace. She did not stoop. Her felt-shod slipper flipped the gas-tap over.

Then she passed out of the door, extinguishing the light as she went. He heard the rustle of the thick curtain as she drew the door close. There was an infinitesimal pause and then the key turned in the lock.

She had behaved throughout the whole proceeding as though she had been getting dinner or tidying the spare room.

In his prison Henry Brownrigg's impotent ghost listened. There was a hissing from the far end of the room.

In the attic, although he could not possibly hear it, he knew the meter ticked every two or three seconds.

Henry Brownrigg saw in a vision the scene in the morning. Every room in the house had the same key, so Millie would have no difficulty in explaining that on awakening she had noticed the smell of gas and, on finding her husband's door locked, had opened it with her own key.

The ghost stirred in its shell. Once again the earth and earthly incidents looked small and negligible. The oblivion was coming, the darkness was waiting; only now it was no longer exciting darkness.

The shell moved. He felt it writhe and choke. It was fighting — fighting — fighting.

The darkness drew him. He was no longer conscious of the shell now. It had been beaten. It had given up the fight.

The streak of light beneath the blind where the street lamp shone was fading. Fading. Now it was gone.

As Henry Brownrigg's ghost crept out into the cold a whisper came to it, ghastly in its conviction:

"They never get caught, that kind. They're too dull, too practical, too unimaginative. They never get caught."

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"The Yellow Jumper" is the seventh case history of the Department of Dead Ends to appear in EQMM — the seventh in a brilliant series of modern "inverted" detective stories. Consistent always in tone, approach and technique, these tales achieve for the author, Roy Vickers, an almost complete suspension of disbelief: the reader, enthralled by the richness and authenticity of photographic detail, accepts them unreservedly as real-life cases. Whether they are or not, whether they are based on true crimes or cut out of the whole cloth of Mr. Vickers's imagination, they possess the charm and realism of William Roughead and Edmund Pearson, and the factual fascination of Great English Trials. In a phrase, these chronicles of love, hatred, and murder are in the grand tradition; and they exemplify, in the storytelling art, what has been called "the genius of irregularity."

We challenge you, once you have dipped into this crime passionnel, to stop reading. We challenge you, once you have glimpsed the moonlight on running water, to put aside this story of the eternal triangle. We challenge you, once you have made the acquaintance of Ruth Watlington, Rita Steevens, and poor Herbert Cudden, to stop pursuing the inexorable clue of yellow jumper. But we seriously doubt, once you have started, if any of you can break the magic spell. . . .

THE YELLOW JUMPER

by ROY VICKERS

THE EXECUTION of Ruth Watlington sent a shudder through respectable, middle-class Britain. If she had in some way repudiated her upbringing, by becoming a crook or a drug-addict, or a "bad woman," it would have been more comfortable all around. As it was, her exposure created the suspicion that the impulse to murder is likely to seize almost anybody who has enough animal courage to see it through. It was not even a *crime passionnel*, although scented hair, moonlight playing on running water, and a wedding became subsidiary factors — particularly the moonlight on the running water.

This is in no sense a love chronicle; but we must for a moment concern ourselves with the romantic vaporings of poor Herbert Cudden, the mathematical master at Hemel Abbey, a girls' boarding school in Devonshire. At eight-thirty on May 2, 1934, a week before the summer term opened, he was alone in the empty schoolhouse putting the finishing touches to his syllabus. His thoughts kept sliding to a young, modern-languages mistress, Rita Steevens, who

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had come, fresh from the University, a couple of terms ago.

An under-vitalized man, he had been astonished at his own boldness in proposing marriage to her, still more astonished when she accepted. Incidentally, he had been very grateful to his friend and colleague, Ruth Watlington, for inviting Rita to share her cottage.

Daydreaming of this young woman, he visualized her in the dress in which he had last seen her. Now, if he had simply remembered that she had looked delightful in whatever she was wearing, it would have been better for his own peace of mind in later years. He was not the kind of man who understands women's dress. Nevertheless, he happened to visualize Rita in what women call a pinafore dress, though he did not know the term. He visualized a pale green, sleeveless dress with a sleeved underbodice of yellow — the dress that was eventually produced at the trial after the police had, as it were, walked clean over it without seeing anything in it but the bloodstains.

So much for the dress. As for the moonlight — the full moon, which on that day rose at six thirty-seven in the afternoon, was already tinging the dusk when Cudden crossed the campus and dropped the syllabus in the letter box of the headmistress's house.

Skirting a playing-field, he crossed a spuriously antique bridge over the Brynn, a sizeable trout stream of an average depth of a dozen inches, with many a deep pool which made it dangerous to children, though the swift current would generally carry them to safety. Feeling his thirty-six years as nothing, he very nearly vaulted the stile giving on to the wood — part of the school estate — that ran down the side of the hill to the village of Hemel, where most of the teaching staff were accommodated.

He was wearing a mackintosh. A man of many small anxieties, he nearly always carried a mackintosh. Presently he turned off the track, to Drunkard's Leap — a pool in the Brynn some ten feet in breadth and some forty feet deep. When Rita was half-an-hour overdue he lit a cigarette. When the cigarette was finished he was not impatient. He sat down on an old bench like a park seat. As he did so the centre plank fell out.

"Funny! The screws must have rotted out of the bracket." He ran his hand along the bench, noticed, without interest, that the bracket itself was no longer in position. Rita was later than usual.

The stream, tumbling over rocks into the pool, threw up a spray, and for the first time he saw a rainbow of moonlight. He must remember to point it out to Rita. Below the rainbow, the moon shimmered on the turbulent surface of the pool, so that the pool itself seemed to be made of liquid moonlight.

So he described it to the Coroner — liquid moonlight. Then, he said, a light cloud crossed the moon so that the rainbow and the shimmer faded

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out. Instead, a diffused glow enabled him to see beneath the surface of the pool. And a few feet beneath the surface of the pool, below the current, he saw Rita Steevens.

For some seconds, he supposed, he gazed at the staring eyes, at the hair lightly swaying, as if stirred by a sluggish breeze. Then the cloud passed, and he could again see nothing but the shimmering surface of the pool.

He shaded his eyes, lurched to and fro, trying to escape from the angle of light. He grabbed the loose beam of the bench, intending to bridge the rocks of the waterfall to get a new angle, but he stumbled, cutting his hand on a splinter of the beam, which splashed into the pool and was carried away.

He related that he shouted at himself as if he were someone else. "Pull yourself together, man! You were dazzled by the moonlight, and you've had an hallucination. You were thinking of Rita, and beginning to fear she had met with an accident, and you visualized your fear. How could she be sort of standing up under the water like that?"

He half-believed it. The other half sent him scurrying from the pool down the track to the village: "Check up at the cottage anyway," he muttered. "Better not mention the hallucination — make people laugh. It's partly that damned syllabus. Anxiety complex!"

Fortunate that Ruth Watlington's cottage was so near! At the end of the track through the wood, he did not vault the stile; he took it slowly, regaining his breath, coming to terms with his panic. A hundred yards of scrub, then the cottage, built at right angles to the lane that wound its way to the village. Slowly across the scrub.

Already he could discern the wicket gate of the cottage garden. And there — a dozen feet away — were the yellow sleeves, the pale green dress, grey-white in the moonlight. He bounded forward. As he snatched her in his arms his nostrils were filled with the scent he had never perceived on any other woman — the scent of gardenia.

"Oh, my darling — thank God — had a ghastly hallucination! Thought I saw you standing up drowned — in Drunkard's Leap." Her head was resting on his shoulder. The scent of gardenia spurred him — he could have vaulted innumerable stiles. "Speak, Rita, darling!"

"But I'm *not* Rita!" cried Ruth Watlington. "What on earth is the matter with you, Herbert?"

He swung her round so that she faced the moon.

"It must be this dress," she said. "Rita wore it once and didn't like it, so I took it off her hands."

He gaped at her, his senses in a vacuum in which his one clear impression was the scent of gardenia, almost as sharp as when, but a moment ago, her head had lain on his shoulder.

"I thought the hallucination, or whatever it is, was about me, and you seemed hysterical, or I wouldn't have —"

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"Then perhaps it wasn't hallucination!" he gasped. "Where is Rita?"

"By now she's at Lynmouth, where she is spending the night with her cousin, Fred Calder, and his wife. They've got a bungalow there. Mr. Calder rang up before Rita came in. She had just time to catch the eight-fifty bus. She asked me to phone you, which I did. Effie Cumber — one of the kitchen-maids, in case you don't know — took the message. I told her you'd be in your classroom. But, I'm afraid I forgot till about nine."

"I left a little before nine. Then Rita never went near Drunkard's Leap!" He laughed at his own fear, though it wasn't a wholesome laugh. "Yet — it was horrible! I can't believe it wasn't real."

"Well, come in first and tell me all about it. I've got a bottle of brandy for emergencies. I think you have been overworking on that syllabus. . . . Oh, you've cut your hand — it's bleeding. I'll try and bind it up for you, though I'm very bad at anything to do with blood."

"It's nothing. Must have cut it when I fell down."

He followed her into the sitting-room of the cottage, stopping in the hall to hang up his mackintosh.

As is known, he stayed there for about an hour, leaving before eleven, slightly fuddled with brandy. Ruth's purpose was to delay investigation. No police system, however scientific, could be expected to solve the riddle of why she should want to create the delay. The pool was obviously useless as a permanent hiding place. Once she had made her getaway, as she had, it would not have mattered to her if the police had found the body a few minutes later.

Nor did anybody attribute any special importance to Herbert Cudden's assertion that, in mistaking Ruth for Rita, he was misled not only by Rita's dress, but also by Rita's particular perfume. Yet Ruth Watlington was convicted — thanks to Detective Inspector Rason of the Department of Dead Ends — for no other reason than that she had put on the dead girl's dress and worn her perfume.

After a stiff brandy, Herbert gave Ruth details of the now supposed hallucination.

"But the pool is forty feet deep!" objected Ruth. "If there had been a body under the surface it would have been at the bottom, and you couldn't have seen it without a strong searchlight."

"I know. But one does not think of things like that at the time."

He told her about it all over again, and then, his fear banished, they talked about Rita in general, an absorbing topic to both. This conversation has been grossly misunderstood by the commentators, who said that it revealed Ruth as an hysteric, titillating her own terror by talking about the woman she had just murdered. Her showing him her scrapbook of babies' photographs was stigmatized as the height of hypocrisy — alter-

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natively as indicating a depth of morbid cruelty which would almost justify a plea of insanity.

Whereas the truth is that if Ruth had been a hypocrite she would never have committed the murder. "The schoolmarm who beat Scotland Yard" would have had short shrift if the police had been able to grasp that, though she was capable of murder, she was not capable of insincerity, cruelty, or greed.

At the time of the murder, Ruth was thirty-seven; would have been physically mistakable for thirty if she had not affected a certain dowdiness of dress. She was trim and springy, athletic without a touch of thickness. A truth about herself that she did not know was that the right touch here and there would have converted her into a more than ordinarily attractive woman. When she was sixteen, a boy of her own age had kissed her at a party, to her own satisfaction. Three days later she overheard the boy laughing about it to another boy. There was a loutish reference to her own over-estimation of her charms.

The incident distressed her sufficiently for her to confide in her young stepmother, for whom, in defiance of tradition, she entertained a warm affection. It did not occur to her that Corinne Watlington, who was only seven years older, might be sexually jealous.

"Men are rather beastly, you know," explained Corinne Watlington. "They lure you on with flattery and then laugh at you. It's as well to be on guard, or you may find yourself humiliated where you least expect it."

Ruth did not want to be humiliated, so she went on guard — so effectively that the young men of her generation dubbed her a prude and a codfish, and left her out — which made her manner more brusque than ever.

Following Corinne's advice, Ruth concentrated on a career. She won a scholarship to Oxford, generously resigning the bursary, as her mother had left her some two hundred pounds a year. She represented the University in lacrosse, tennis, and fencing. She took honors in history and literature, doing so well that she was invited to read for a Fellowship, but declined, as she wished to teach the young. She was appointed to Mardean, which was then considered the leading school for girls.

When she was twenty-seven she found herself thinking too intensively about one of the classical masters. In her emotion there was no echo of the boys at the parties. Indeed, she hardly thought directly of the man himself. She thought of herself in a house, just large enough, with a very green lawn on which very young children — hers — were playing. Somewhere in the background, giving substance and security to the dream, was the classical master.

Ruth resigned her appointment. She went to Paris; not being analytical, she did not know why she spent six months as a volunteer worker in a

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crèche. But the babies here were vaguely unsatisfactory, and she started the new school year at Hemel Abbey, a praiseworthy but indistinguished replica of Mardean on a less ambitious scale.

Here began that rare association with Herbert Cudden which baffled the romantically-minded commentators. From the first she was able to talk to Herbert without any artificial coldness. From a different angle he found something of the same restfulness in her, for he had always been self-conscious with other women. Ruth, obviously, would never expect him to make love to her. There sprang up, hardly a deep friendship — rather an intimate palliness utterly untouched by romance.

In her first year she bought Wood Cottage. A few weeks after she had settled in she cut the first of the baby pictures from a magazine. In six months, when she had cut another dozen, she began to paste them into a scrapbook. During the years that followed the number of pictures grew. There was nothing secret about it. She would snap village babies with her Kodak, explaining that she was fond of pictures of babies, though they they were so difficult to take. All the same, she never showed the scrapbook to anybody until she showed it to Herbert on the night of the murder.

Herbert used the cottage almost as a club. He came at routine times, always to lunch on Wednesdays and Sundays. She allowed him to pay half the cost of the food and a few pence over in part payment of the village woman who prepared it. Thus nearly nine years slipped by before Rita Steevens came and changed Ruth's perspective.

One evening, when the pupils were away for the halfterm weekend, Ruth met Herbert and Rita together, and was astonished by the look she surprised in Herbert's eyes. For a second she had seen him young, vigorous, commanding — definitely among "the men" — in Corinne's sense of the word. An hour later he came to the cottage and told her, as a great secret, that he had fallen in love with Rita. Ruth expressed sincere delight. A new, inner life was opened to her. At first Rita was cold, almost suspicious. She accepted Ruth's offer to share the cottage with indifference, bargaining shrewdly over her share of the expenses.

By the end of the term she had yielded and was accepting Ruth as mentor and general benefactor.

Ruth was determined — one might say fiercely determined — that life should give to Rita what it had denied to Ruth. She positively groomed those two for each other, and without a single back thought of malice. In her dream life, Ruth had already elected herself an honorary auntie.

A little before six on the night of the murder, while Rita was visiting in the village, Calder had rung to ask Rita to catch the eight-fifty bus — the last — and spend the night at Lynmouth. As the bungalow had no telephone, Calder would meet the

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bus on the chance of Rita coming. Ruth said she would deliver the message if Rita returned in time.

But when Rita came in, shortly after seven, Ruth did not deliver the message. It was the only occasion on which she treated Rita improperly — her selfish motive being that, living by deputy in Rita, she wanted Rita to meet Herbert as arranged. Also, she had just completed her plans for the wedding present, and wanted to tell Rita, and enjoy her surprise.

"You aren't meeting Herbert until nine," she said some time later. "Let's go and sit up at the pool. It's such a lovely night, and I've heaps to talk about. I'll disappear before Herbert comes."

"Righto! This skirt is a bit floppy about the hips. D'you think my suede belt would go with it?"

"It would be just right. I hoped you would wear it."

Ruth, herself dowdy, had become the arbiter of dress. Ruth had designed the pinafore dress of pale green with the underbodice of yellow and had it made by a London-trained woman living in semi-retirement as the village dressmaker. Ruth added: "What do you think of my new jumper?"

"That yellow would clash horribly with the yellow of my pinafore frock," said Rita. "And the collar looks stuffy. You're better at dressing me than yourself. I wonder why. Ruth — why is it?"

"I suppose because I wish I had been like you when I was your age."

Rita felt resentful without knowing why as they set out together, reaching Drunkard's Leap before eight.

"Mind darling, you'll tear your frock!" There was light enough for Ruth to notice that the iron bracket of the bench had worked loose. "The screws have rusted away. They ought to have been painted. I'll tell Miss Harboro." Ruth tugged the bracket and it came clean away, a flat iron bar three feet long with a right angle turn of three inches. She leaned it against the bench so that the estate handyman would see it. They sat down, and Ruth turned the conversation in the direction of her wedding present.

"You and Herbert — your heads are in the clouds, as they ought to be. You haven't thought, for instance, where you're going to live, have you?"

"Oh, Herbert's looking round for something. He likes that sort of thing. And if he can't find anything, there are lots of furnished rooms in the village."

Though it was barely dusk, the full moon shimmered on the surface of the pool. It was a lovely spot, thought Ruth, for Herbert and Rita to meet.

"Furnished rooms are all right when you are single — awful when you're married." Ruth paused, enjoying her moment. "You're going to have Wood Cottage."

"But — d'you mean you're leaving Hemel and want to get rid of it?"

"No, dear, I don't mean that. I mean I want you to have it. I shall take Mrs. Cumber's two rooms, and you needn't worry about me. I shall

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be quite comfortable."

Rita was not worrying about Ruth's comfort. She was feeling that, notwithstanding innumerable small benefits, there was rather too much Ruth in her life. Again came that undefined resentment that had welled up during their dress-talk.

"But, Ruth — of course, it's awfully kind of you to offer to sell it to us, as I know you like it, but I doubt whether Herbert could afford —"

"Darling, there's nothing to afford! It's my little wedding present. I was in Barnstaple this morning, and fixed the title deeds and the rest of it with a solicitor. It's all settled bar formalities. You can talk it over with Herbert tonight."

"I simply don't know what to say!" Rita's voice was sulky. "Ruth, dear, don't you see it's impossible! You're only a little bit better off than we are, and — it's accepting too much."

What did it matter how much she gave them. Their life was hers. Her life would be fulfilled in the lives that were to come.

"Darling, it's not a matter of giving a present that costs a lot of money. It's a matter of sharing happiness. You know what a lot you and Herbert mean to me. And we've got to look ahead. In a year's time there may not be only the two of you to consider."

For a moment Rita was fogged.

"Do you mean we might have a baby?"

"Of course I do!" Ruth laughed happily. Rita laughed too, but a different kind of laugh.

"But I shan't be having any babies."

"One shouldn't say that — it might turn out to be true." It was no more than a mild reproof. Then sudden fear clutched at Ruth. "Rita, there's nothing wrong with you physically, that way, is there?"

"Certainly not!" The girl bridled. "But there's no need to have all that bother if you don't want to — and I don't want to. I'm not the type. And I loathe babies anyway — yells and mess and bother!"

Ruth had the sensation that her body had taken control of her mind. She heard her own voice from outside herself and thought it sounded scrawny and venomous.

"Is it fair to Herbert — to rob your marriage of all meaning?"

"Oh, be your age, Ruth! That belongs in a tuppenny novelette. And I find it a rather disgusting topic, if you don't mind."

One may say that the twentieth-century Ruth Watlington looked on while that part of her that was a thousand ages older than history obeyed a law of its own. Without her conscious volition, her muscles stiffened and she stood up. In her arms and thighs was an odd vibration, as if the corpuscles of her blood were colliding.

She heard the iron bracket whistle through the air — then heard a thud, and another. After a timeless period she felt herself going back into her body, understanding that an iris shutter in her brain had contracted until

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she had been able to see only one thing — that babies were a rather disgusting topic.

The iris was expanding a little. In the reflected moonlight she could see that the bench was glistening with blood. Rita had fallen from the bench and was lying, still.

"I seem to have killed Rita!" She giggled vacuously. "I wonder what Herbert will say!" her iris expanded a little more. She became vaguely aware of an urgency of time. She looked at her wrist watch, but had to try again and again before she could concentrate enough to read that it was half-past eight. Then it was easy to remember that Herbert would be there at nine.

"I'd better put Rita in the pool. When Herbert comes to the cottage I can break it to him gently. But dead bodies float, don't they? Oh well, we'll manage something just for an hour or so!" The iron bracket was ready to her hand.

There was blood at the angle of the bracket. She shuddered with a purely physical revulsion, wiped the bracket on the grass. She worked the short end of the bracket under the suede belt, then rolled the body into the pool near the waterfall. In spite of her care, there was a smear of blood on her left hand. Struggling against nausea she washed it off. The moonlight did not reveal that there was also a smear of blood on the sleeve of her yellow jumper.

In the walk back to the cottage something approaching normality returned, and she realized what she had done. She had no thought of concealment, once she had told Herbert. She would then tell the police that she had killed Rita, but she would not tell them why, and they could not make her.

As she crossed the scrub to the cottage she heard the church clock chiming nine. Perhaps Herbert had finished his work. She hurried into the cottage and rang the school. A kitchenmaid answered. "Will you please go to Mr. Cudden's classroom, and tell him that Miss Steevens is sorry that she cannot keep her appointment."

She turned on the reading lamp. Again came nausea as she saw a smear of blood on the sleeve of her yellow jumper — a smear half the size of the palm of her hand. She whipped off the jumper. She took it to her room, dropped it in the laundry basket, and put it out of her mind.

She had no moral shrinking from what she had done. She even felt a certain exultation, tinged with an unease which had nothing to do with fear of the hangman. She took it for granted that her own life was, in effect, at an end, and this gave her an immense freedom.

She went into Rita's room. It held a faint fragrance of unknown flowers. Spread on the bed was the light green dress and the yellow bodice.

"Oh, I wish I had been Rita!"

She took off all her clothes, put on Rita's. Last, the yellow bodice and the light green dress. Then a spot of

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Rita's scent on her hair and the merest dab behind the ears.

"I do look nice! What a pity! It's only waste. I wonder what was wrong with me?"

Downstairs and into the air. Her life's history floated before her. Rita's clothes helped her to review her past from the angle of a young woman who had no fear that men would lure her on with flattery and then laugh at her. She was actually thinking of the classical master when Herbert's arms closed round her. For a moment she let her head rest on his shoulder, then realized that he had mistaken her for Rita.

The need for personal explanation shattered the mood in which she had wanted to break the news to him. Besides, she saw now that it would save him so little that she was entitled to think of herself. Tomorrow, when they found the body, life for her would end. Tonight she would enjoy an hour of his soothing friendliness for the last time.

When she had made him believe the hallucination theory, she indulged in the child's game of make-believe — "Let's pretend" — that things were as yesterday, and that she had not murdered Rita. She nearly told him about her gift of the cottage, but it would have meant discussion, and she wanted to ask him a question. As the minutes passed the question became more and more important to her. The answer, if it were the right one, would help her to face the gallows with a calm mind.

"Have another brandy."

"Just a little one, and then I must hop off. Another thing Rita wants to do when we're married —"

She shirked putting the question to him directly. She produced her scrapbook to help her approach. The whole of the first page was taken by one ebullient baby who had advertized a milk food. Herbert grinned and turned the pages. "Ah, I used to know one just like that — same expression and everything! And when they look like that, they grab your nose if you get too close. This is a jolly book. Why have you never shown it to me before?"

"Herbert, are you and Rita going to have babies?"

"I don't see why we shouldn't. I've got a bit in the stocking, and so has she."

"Oh, I am glad!" There was a turbulence in her that he must have sensed.

"And I'm glad you're glad. Ruth, dear, you can scream for the village policeman if you like, but I'm going to kiss you."

When he kissed her, Ruth knew what it was that had been wrong with her. She also knew that to talk of robbing a man of fatherhood did not belong in a tuppenny novelette.

"I'm only thirty-seven; there's still time," she told herself when he had gone. Murder could never be justified, and she would never so deceive herself. But a form of atonement for having taken life seemed to be open to her.

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On the following morning, at about seven-fifteen, Herbert Cudden's landlady took his shoes out of doors with a view to cleaning them. It was, in a sense, unfortunate for Scotland Yard that Police-Sergeant Tottle happened to amble by on his bicycle.

"Good morning, Mr. Tottle. Your George's garden is a credit to the family. *Oo!* You don't 'appen to have had a nice murder, I suppose? Look at these!"

She held up the shoes. The rim of the sole and the back of one heel was caked with dried blood.

"Don't you touch 'em until I've seen 'em," barked the sergeant.

"Don't be silly! I was only joking — it can't be *human* blood. They're Mr. Cudden's. As if —"

The sergeant took the shoes and examined them.

"Take me up to his room," he ordered.

When he had succeeded in waking Herbert Cudden, the latter's reactions were, from the police point of view, ideal.

"Oh, my God!" It was almost like a woman's scream. "I shall go mad." He leaped out of bed, thrust Wellingtons over his pyjamas. "You'd better come with me, Sergeant. Give me those shoes."

"Here, what's it all about, Mr. Cudden?"

"Oh, shut up, please! I must see Miss Watlington at once, or I tell you I shall go mad. Hang on to the shoes if you like, but come with me."

Ruth was startled into wakefulness by hearing her name called while Herbert and the sergeant were still fifty yards from the cottage. She was in her dressing gown and at the doorway almost as soon as they were.

"That hallucination!" Herbert was out of breath. "Blood on my shoes — show them to her. Look! It wasn't hallucination, Ruth. Rita was murdered on the bank and thrown in. We must drag Drunkard's Leap."

"Will one of you please explain —"

"Oh, all right then! I'll tell you."

It was Herbert who poured out the tale of the previous evening's experiences, of his discussion with Ruth, and the reasons for their joint conclusion that he had suffered an hallucination.

"Then as I understand it, after what you'd seen, or what you only thought you'd seen, you came to this cottage, and — is this your mackintosh by any chance?"

The mackintosh was hanging on a peg in the hall. The sergeant pulled it out fanwise. The whole of the seat and part of the back were covered with congealed blood.

"How did that blood get there? On your mackintosh and on your shoes?"

"It must be *her* blood. That must have been done when I flopped on to the bench."

"And what's the matter with your hand that you've got that bandage?"

"Oh, hell to these footling questions! Sergeant, for heaven's sake, *do* something! Can't you see that she has been murdered?"

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The sergeant had never handled murder. This was unlike any he had read about. For one thing, the suspect was actually directing the investigation!

While Tottle, at Ruth's suggestion, was ringing the Lynmouth police to find out whether Rita had spent the night at Calder's bungalow, Ruth went upstairs to dress.

On a hanger on the door was the yellow underbodice. She put it in her wardrobe. Over a chair hung the pale green sleeveless dress. As she picked it up, she caught her breath. At the back, a little above the waistline, was a distinct blood stain. For a moment she had a sense of eerieness, as if blood would meet her everywhere. Then she remembered.

"That was done when Herbert put his arm round me before I bound up his hand."

She dropped the dress into the laundry basket — on top of the blood-stained yellow jumper. She looked down at them, trying to assess their danger to herself. Then she shrugged her shoulders, and went on dressing. She had an almost superstitious belief that if destiny intended her to atone for her crime it would protect her from the police.

By ten they had found the body in Drunkard's Leap, its position explained by the fact that the iron bracket had jammed between two outcrops of rock some eight feet below the surface. By mid-day the county police were in the village in force. Detailed statements were taken from Cudden and Ruth, covering everything, even including Ruth's visit to her solicitor to arrange for the conveyance of the cottage to Herbert Cudden and his wife. The police took away for microscopic analysis Herbert's mackintosh and shoes and Ruth's yellow jumper and the pale green sleeveless dress. The analysis revealed that the blood on Herbert's garments had been exposed to the air for at least half an hour before it had adhered — which bore out his statements about the times of his movements.

Analysis of the skirt and jumper showed that the blood was newly shed when it had adhered — which bore out the joint statement that Herbert mistook Ruth, outside the cottage, for Rita and pawed her, after he had cut his hand by the pool.

The Coroner's jury would have censured Herbert for his over-readiness to believe he had experienced an hallucination had not Ruth generously insisted that the blame, if any, should be wholly hers. The Court returned a verdict of murder against person or persons unknown.

The school term opened in a somewhat strained atmosphere. True that only three of the hundred and fifty pupils were withdrawn on account of the scandal. But there was an unhealthy interest in the events. The headmistress explained that poor Miss Steevens had been killed by a madman who did not know what he was doing — a theory that was helped by a Press

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attempt to link the case up with a maniac murder in the North of England.

Ruth let the backwash of the murder splash round her without giving it her attention. Scotland Yard rented all available rooms in the village inn. As there were apparently no clues they used the dragnet, checking the movements of every man within twenty miles and every automobile that could have been used. They would apply to Ruth now and again, mainly for information about the dead girl's habits.

In three weeks they packed up, leaving a pall of suspicion over the whole countryside. In due course the mackintosh and the shoes, the pale green sleeveless dress and the yellow jumper, minutely documented, were sent to the Department of Dead Ends.

Herbert's visits to the cottage became more frequent. At first he would sit in silence, assured of her sympathy. In time Ruth loosened his tongue and let him talk himself out of his melancholy.

The strong forces in her nature which had produced the brainstorm at Drunkard's Leap were now concentrated upon the purpose with which she had successfully drugged her conscience. Herbert Cudden was overwhelmed by those forces at the moment of her choosing — which was as soon as the summer term ended.

Again we are not concerned with the detail of the methods by which that formidable will induced a transference to Ruth of the emotion which Herbert had felt for Rita. It suffices to say that it happened according to her plan. They could write to the headmistress after the ceremony, she said, but they need not announce their marriage until the autumn term. As they particularly wished to avoid newspaper publicity they would be married by registrar in the East End of London.

This can hardly be called a tactical blunder on Ruth's part because, as far as the police were concerned, she had exercised no tactics. She did not know that a great many persons who wish to marry more or less in secret, particularly bigamists, regularly hit on that same idea. So the East End registrars invariably supply the police with a list of those applicants who obviously do not belong to the neighborhood.

They each took a "suitcase address" and applied for a seven-day licence. Detective-Inspector Rason received the notice on the second day.

"Oh! So it was a triangle after all!" he exclaimed without logical justification. "And now they're getting married on the quiet. That probably means that they cooked up all the hallucination stuff together. Anything they said may have been true or may not."

He took out the yellow jumper, the pale green sleeveless dress, and the mackintosh, which, with the iron bracket, was the only real evidence he had. In the garments there was no smell of gardenia.

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"But Herbert said the dress Ruth was wearing was Rita's dress and that it smelt of gardenia. Well, it doesn't! Perhaps the scent has worn off in three months. Better put a query to the Chemical Department."

He had difficulty in finding the proper form, still more difficulty in filling it out. So instead, he sought out his twenty-year-old niece.

"When you put scent on your dress, my dear, how long does the dress go on smelling of it?"

"Oh, uncle! You never put any on your dress. It isn't good for the dress and the scent goes stale and your best friends won't tell you. You put it on your hair and behind your ears."

So if there had been a smell of gardenia it meant *that Ruth had deliberately applied it — the other girl's perfume!*

Presently his thought crystallized.

"If Ruth was really wearing Rita's dress and Rita's scent, Herbert is telling the truth. If not — not! Wonder how far we can check up on the dress itself."

He searched jumper and dress for a trademark and found none. "Then the dress must have been homemade. Or perhaps the village dressmaker."

Deciding to take a long shot he was in Hemel the following afternoon.

"Yes, I made that for the poor girl," said Miss Amstey. "It was a present from Miss Watlington. She designed it and the yellow underbodice to wear with it, and I must say it looked very well."

Journey from London for nothing, thought Rason. Out of mere politeness he asked: "And you made this jumper, too, to go with it?"

"No, I didn't! That's a cheap line — came out of a shop. Besides, it wasn't poor Rita's. It was Miss Watlington's. I saw her wearing it the very day of the murder. And I must say I thought it frightful. Apart from its being made of cotton and the underbodice made of silk."

"Then this jumper and this dress don't go together — they belonged to different women? But you could wear the one with the other if you wanted to, couldn't you?"

"Well, you *could*," admitted Miss Amstey, "but you'd look rather funny. For one thing, it has a collar. And for another, the tops of the sleeves — look, what I expect you call a 'ridge' here — would stick out at the sides of the dress. People would turn round and laugh."

That left Rason with the now simple riddle of the bloodstains. The two garments worn together would produce a ridiculous effect. Yet there were bloodstains, deemed to have been made by Cudden's hand, at the same time on both. And Herbert had identified both dress and jumper at the inquest.

Rason took it all down and got Miss Amstey to sign it.

Ruth decided that they could without impropriety arrive at the registrar's in the same taxi carrying the suitcases that had established the legality of their address. In outward

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appearance she had changed. The talent for dress she had formerly exercised for another was now successfully applied to herself. In the hall of the registrar's office, Rason accosted Herbert and introduced himself.

"I am sorry, Mr. Cudden, but I must ask you both to accompany me to headquarters. A serious discrepancy has been discovered in the evidence you gave in the coroner's court."

They were taken to the Chief Superintendent's room. Three others were with him. Ruth was invited to sit.

Herbert was reminded of his evidence regarding the dress. Then the pale green sleeveless dress was handed to him.

"Is that the dress?"

"To the best of my belief — yes." He turned it. "Yes — there's the bloodstain."

The yellow jumper was passed to him. After a similar examination he again answered.

"Yes."

"Miss Watlington, do you agree that these two garments, formerly belonging to the deceased, were worn by you that night?"

"Yes," said Ruth, though she could guess what had happened and knew that there could be but little hope.

The Chief Superintendent spoke next.

"You will both be detained on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Rita Steevens."

"No!" snapped Ruth. "Mr. Cudden has told the truth throughout. He knows nothing about women's clothes except their color. The color of that jumper was near enough for him to think it was the same. They were passed to him separately at the inquest."

"Ruth, I can't follow this!" protested Herbert.

"Miss Watlington is making a gallant attempt to get you out of your present difficulty," said the Chief. "But I'm afraid it will be futile."

"It will not be futile," said Ruth. "Will you all remain just as you are, please, and let me go behind the Chief Superintendent's chair. And can I have that dress?"

Behind the superintendent's chair she whipped off her fashionable walking suit. Then she put on the jumper and the pale green sleeveless dress, struggling against her nausea.

Then, looking as ridiculous as Miss Amstey had prophesied, she stood where all could see her. The officials were awed into silence.

"Herbert, you have only to answer me naturally to clear up the whole absurd mistake. Was I, or was I not, dressed like this that night?"

"No, of course not. Your neck was bare. And you looked properly dressed. That thing doesn't fit."

Ruth turned to the Chief and his colleagues.

"You see, he is obviously innocent." She added, almost casually: "I am not."

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SPEAKING OF CRIME

A Department of Comment and Criticism

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

Mystery Mélange: East Coast mystery writers, editors, publishers slowly recovering from whirlwind visit of Craig Rice, whodunit cover-girl and Santa Monica's gift to detection. Looking cheerfully like her "Time" photos, she's a relaxed dynamo; would rather talk about her three children (those wonderful youngsters of HOME SWEET HOMICIDE, now grown older) than her impressive writing, screen, radio, critical, and editorial commitments. . . . She'll have two novels out next Fall: MY KINGDOM FOR A HEARSE in her own name and THE TROUBLE WITH ROSES as "Michael Venning."

MURDER CAVALCADE, first annual Mystery Writers of America anthology (patterned on famous London Detection Club anthologies) will be published in July by Duell, Sloan & Pearce. . . . Raymond Chandler, having finished original screen-play "The Blue Dahlia," is reported working on new Phil Marlowe novel. . . . Elizabeth Daly, author of the Gamadge mysteries, comes naturally by her knowledge of Old New York and its families. Her father was a justice of the New York Supreme Court and her uncle was Augustin Daly, the celebrated playwright and producer. . . . Add whodunit writers trying "serious" fiction: Hildegarde and Darwin Teilhet, Melba Marlett. . . . Several readers have reminded me that Richard Lakin's THE BODY FELL ON BERLIN (Putnam, 1943) belongs on the brief list of mysteries with military backgrounds. (See also HANGMAN'S HILL below.)

Rex Stout, Brett Halliday, Phoebe Atwood Taylor changing publishers. . . . Sgt. Josiah E. Greene, whose NOT IN OUR STARS won Macmillan Centenary Award for best work of fiction by a member of the armed forces, wrote detective stories (THE LAUGHING LOON, etc.) before the war, reviewed whodunits for Providence "Journal". . . . Clayton ("The Great Merlini") Rawson has left "True Detective" to head new Ziff-Davis mystery book department. . . . Dorothy Gardiner's BEER FOR PSYCHE, scheduled by Crime Club this Summer, will be her first since A DRINK FOR MR. CHERRY (1934). That's a long time between — er — titles. . . . Ruth Sawtell Wallis, whose whodunits revel in anthropological backgrounds, really doubles in brass. Her latest opus (*not* a mystery) is entitled SEX DIFFERENCES IN CEPHALIC INDEX DURING GROWTH. . . . And in case you didn't know, Dorothy (THE UNINVITED) Macardle's new chiller, out soon, will be called THE UNFORESEEN. It's about second sight.

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Mystery Mail-Bag: This department's remarks in the April issue about the suspense novel in general and Charlotte Armstrong's THE UNSUSPECTED (Coward-McCann) in particular have provoked, to the date of this writing, two vigorous rejoinders, each by outstanding authority.

Rising to Miss Armstrong's defense, Miss Lee Wright, the respected editor of Simon & Schuster's Inner Sanctum Mysteries, writes me more in sorrow than in anger: "You seem to be pleading for mystification for the sheer joy of mystification. You say that Miss Armstrong sacrificed it needlessly. I think she sacrificed it deliberately for purposes of construction.

"You want Miss Armstrong to write a book in which Mathilda is the central figure, whereas she wanted to write a book in which Mathilda was only a pawn in the game between the two forces of good (Francis) and evil (Grandison). The author specifically did not want the reader to be in doubt from the beginning about which was which. Mathilda in this book does *not* represent the reader, and was never intended to. The interest is kept from the first page on the major issue — the struggle between Francis and Grandison — and Mathilda represents the result of that struggle. Thus, the author keeps her basic idea, her basic conflict, her basic story-line, pure and undiluted, and this seems to me the very essence of the book's success and power. . . . Doubtless the author could have written an excellent book along the lines you suggest, but it would have been a very different book, and, to my way of thinking, a much less original one."

What do other readers think?

James Sandoe, Assistant Professor of Bibliography and English Literature at the University of Colorado, and a foremost student of the blood, attacks the subject from another angle: "Let me join you in complaining against the indiscriminate use by publishers and critics of the word 'psychological' as applied to mysteries.

"When a publisher describes a new mystery story as a 'psychological novel' or 'psycho-thriller' he does so, presumably, because readers who habitually borrow their detective stories from rental libraries might conceivably be induced to *buy* a book with the more impressive label. This is understandable from a commercial viewpoint. But the tendency of professional critics to fall into the same habit is more disturbing because (in addition to the misuse of the adjective nine times out of ten) it suggests a lack of the respect due the *genre* in its own right. A disrespect which manifests itself by eagerness to describe any notably good detective novel by any other name than its own. . . . It is a little disquieting, at this late date, to discover that the vaunted 'respectability' of the 'tec is actually so thinly established.

"I suggest that if a good many of the mystery stories which have been inaccurately called 'psychological' whatnots cannot be described properly as tales of detection, they

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can reasonably be called 'tales of suspense' or, in a few cases, 'tales of terror' — and that these phrases are less pretentious and more exact than the more resounding but misleading tags some publishers and critics have been using so loosely."

New Editions: As one who has often regretted the short life-in-print of the mystery novel, I am glad to bring you news of several publishers who are defying production hazards to bring back and keep alive outstanding mysteries of past years in attractive and suitably priced editions you will want for your library shelves. . . . Now available in the "Black Widow Thriller" series issued by Alfred A. Knopf, at $2 per volume, are most of the works of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Eric Ambler, and E. C. Bentley, with additional titles scheduled as soon as manufacturing conditions permit. . . . The series known as "European Espionage Novels" published by Little, Brown & Co. and also priced at $2, now includes titles by Ethel Vance, Geoffrey Household, Martha Albrand, and Helen MacInnes; I understand that this imprint also will receive additions from time to time. . . . And new crime-mystery titles added this Spring to the distinguished list of the Modern Library (now entirely back in stock for the first time in several years) are THE ADVENTURES and MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES in one volume at 95¢ and the indefatigable Bennett Cerf's excellent selection of THREE FAMOUS MURDER NOVELS (BEFORE THE FACT, TRENT'S LAST CASE, and THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW) between the covers of a single Modern Library "Giant" at $1.75. . . . Ask your bookseller to show you all three of these series (or write for publishers' catalogs). They merit your patronage. . . . It's also news that this Spring's publication of DRURY LANE'S LAST CASE by Ellery Queen (Little, Brown, $2) completes the reissue of all the Drury Lane novels, originally published under the pseudo-pseudonym "Barnaby Ross." . . . And that Viking Press has reissued Graham Greene's THE LABYRINTHINE WAYS under the original English title THE POWER AND THE GLORY, at $2.50.

Crimes in Brief: At well past 80, A. E. W. Mason is the acknowledged dean of English detection writers, and a new Hanaud & Ricardo story from his pen is an occasion for rejoicing. Although THE HOUSE IN LORDSHIP LANE (Dodd, Mead) falls considerably short of being another THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW, it is a full-bodied, mannered, intricate novel of the British Old School that will reward readers who are willing, for auld lang syne, to condone undue length and some disturbing coincidences. . . . The most talked about suspense novel of the Spring crop, Elizabeth Sanxay Holding's THE INNOCENT MRS. DUFF (Simon & Schuster) offers the reader an internal view of the moral and spiritual decline and fall of Jacob Duff, to the accompaniment of criminous echoes

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of THE LOST WEEKEND. It wasn't until Mrs. Holding's spell had worn off that I found myself wondering: (a) at the speed of Duff's disintegration; (b) that he had lived so long. . . . In A VOICE LIKE VELVET (Random House) by Donald L. Henderson, the author of MR. BOWLING BUYS A NEWSPAPER applies his dissective technique to the problem of Ernest Bisham, BBC announcer by day and cat burglar by night. The ending seems out of key with the rest of the story — which, like its predecessor, is not every man's dish. . . . Helen Eustis' THE HORIZONTAL MAN (Harper) introduces one of the most exciting new writing talents in some time. Concerning the murder of a young male instructor in an American girls' college, it is also one of the few recent novels billed as "psychological" which lives up to the adjective (see Sandoe above). Miss Eustis suggests, on occasion, both Raymond Postgate and Cornell Woolrich, but her handling of humor and dialogue is *sui generis*. Her novel, incidentally, is not for the tender-minded. . . . Meticulous background work distinguishes Franklyn Pell's HANGMAN'S HILL (Dodd, Mead), about the death of an unpopular war correspondent during a night engagement in Alsace. Action is on the slow side, but Pell, who was a correspondent himself, is a first-novelist to watch. . . . Another newcomer for your list is Allan MacKinnon, young Britisher, whose MONEY ON THE BLACK (Crime Club) pits Detective-Sgt. David Stanners, on leave from the Army, and Inspector Duncan MacCallum of The Yard against a gang of London black market operators in a pleasantly straightforward blend of deduction, action, and romance. . . . Most disappointing beginner is Verne Chute. His tough tale of amnesia, FLIGHT OF AN ANGEL (Morrow), goes great guns for the first half, then degenerates into mawkishness you won't believe, including a disguise scene that would have spelled c-o-r-n in 1910. . . . And major disappointment sweepstakes are won hands-down by Michael Innes' Appleby-less THE UNSUSPECTED CHASM (Dodd, Mead). A frantic and overwritten business about international art thievery, it might pass as fantasy — and judged as such has isolated moments of amusement — but the only mystery about it is why it was published as one. . . . Appleby addicts will do better with HOLY DISORDERS (Lippincott) by Edmund Crispin, pseudonymous young author (the significance of the pen-name will not be lost on Innesians) of last year's well liked OBSEQUIES AT OXFORD. . . . Which leaves me only space to recommend Anthony Gilbert's DEATH LIFTS THE LATCH (Barnes); Lavinia Davis's BARREN HERITAGE (Crime Club); Elizabeth Daly's SOMEWHERE IN THE HOUSE (Rinehart).

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From the dossier of Ben Hecht: in rough chronological order his vocations and avocations include his being a child-prodigy violinist, a circus acrobat, a theatre owner, a reporter, a novelist, a foreign correspondent, a columnist, a newspaper publisher, a playwright, a scenarist, and a motion picture producer. In a phrase: the background of one of the great storytellers of our time.

"The Rival Dummy" is not among Ben Hecht's most famous stories. Indeed, it is not well-known at all. Yet it is richly representative of Mr. Hecht's highly individualistic talent: to paraphrase Mr. Hecht himself, it is strange, weird, and crazy; partly because it tells the story of "the strangest, weirdest, craziest man in New York" — Gabbo the Great, the world's screwiest ventriloquist.

"The Rival Dummy" belongs to that rare category of fiction which can only be described as "off the trail." It will remind you, although in an entirely different way, of Marc Connelly's "Coroner's Inquest," in EQMM, issue of September 1944. These unconventional, unorthodox little classics — so odd, so off the beaten track, that they are literally outré *— are out-of-season delicacies calculated to stimulate the taste-buds of those fans whose appetites are somewhat jaded by run-of-the-meal murders. Yes, here is murder out of the ordinary, murder out of mania, murder* outré. . . .

THE RIVAL DUMMY

by BEN HECHT

I WAS DINING in a place where vaudeville "artists" congregate to gossip and boast, when my friend Joe Ferris, the booking agent, pointed to a stocky little man with a gray toupée, alone at a table, and said:

"There is, I think, the strangest, weirdest, craziest man in New York."

I looked a second time, and noted, despite this identification, nothing more unusual than the aforesaid gray toupée, a certain bewildered and shifty manner about the eyes, and a pair of nervous sensitive hands. He reminded me — this solitary diner — of some second-rate Hungarian fiddler worn out with poverty, alcohol, and egotism.

"That," said Joe Ferris, "is the man who ten years ago used to be known as Gabbo the Great — the world's most famous ventriloquist. I guess he heard me" — the booking agent lowered his voice — "but it doesn't matter. He'll pretend he didn't. We're not supposed to know who he is, you know. That's what the toupée is for. Disguise. Mad — madder than a cuckoo. It gives me the shivers just to look at him.

"I'll tell you his story," continued Ferris, "and maybe you can figure it out. That's more than I can. But being a newspaper man, you won't call me a liar. I hate to tell stories to people who are always certain that any-

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thing they never heard of before is a lie.

"This particular yarn" — Ferris smiled — "began way back before the war. He came over from Belgium. Gabbo. That's where a good percentage of the best performers come from. God knows why. Jugglers, contortionists, trapeze acts, strong men, and all that kind of stuff. Belgium and Lithuania sometimes.

"I booked Gabbo when he first landed. The best all-around ventriloquist that ever played the big time — if I do say so. And nuts, of course. But you got to expect that from the talent. I never see a first-rate act that wasn't at least half nutty.

"The first time I met him I ask him what his last name is.

" 'Gabbo what?' I ask.

" 'Gabbo the Great,' is the answer. And then he adds very seriously, 'I was born Great.'

"I thought at first this was the foreign equivalent for a gag. But there was less humor about Gabbo than a dead mackerel. He used to sign his letters G. G. Imagine. And — to give you a rough idea of what kind of a loon this baby was — he always opened his act with the *Marseillaise*.

"He used to come out in the middle of it, stand at attention till it was finished, and then, in a low, embarrassed voice, announce: 'Ladies and Gentlemen: I have the honor to present to you tonight the world's most gifted ventriloquist — Gabbo the Great.'

"And he would take a bow. That's pretty cuckoo, ain't it? But it always went big. You'd be surprised at what an audience will swallow and applaud.

"Well, the first time I came to the conclusion that there was something definitely cockeyed about Gabbo was when I called on him one night after his performance at the palace. It was up in his room at the hotel. He'd just got in and was taking his dummy out of its black case. It had velvet lining in it, this case, and was trimmed in black and gold like a magician's layout.

"Let me tell you about this dummy — if I can. You've seen them. One of those red-cheeked, round-headed marionettes with popping, glassy eyes and a wide mouth that opens and shuts.

"Well, Jimmy — that was the name of this wooden-headed thing — was no different from the rest of them. That is, you wouldn't think so to look at it. That thing haunts me, honest to God. I can still see its dangling legs with the shoes painted on its feet and — let's forget about it. Where was I?

"Oh, yes. I go up to his room and stand there talking to him, and just as I'm making some remark or other, he sits Jimmy up on the bed, and all of a sudden turns to him — or it or whatever you want to call the thing — and starts holding a conversation.

" 'I suppose,' says Gabbo, angry as blazes and glaring at this dummy, 'I suppose you're proud of yourself, eh? After the way you acted tonight?'

"And Jimmy, the dummy, so help me, answers back in a squeaky voice, 'Aw, go soak your head. Listen to

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who's talkin'.'

"Then this nutty ventriloquist speaks up kind of heatedly. 'I'm talkin',' he says. 'And I'll ask you to listen to what I have to say. You forgot your jokes tonight, and if it happens again you get no milk.'

"Well, I thought it was a gag. You know, a bit of clowning for my benefit. So I stand by, grinning like an ape, although it don't look funny at all, while Gabbo pours a glass of milk and, opening Jimmy's mouth, feeds it to him. Then he turns to me, like I was a friend of the family, and says coolly: 'This Jimmy is getting worse and worse. What I wanted to see you about, Mr. Ferris, is taking his picture off the billing. I want to teach him a lesson.'

"I've had them before — cuckoos, I mean — and it didn't surprise me. Much. They come pretty queer in vaudeville.

"Remind me to tell you some time about the prima donna I had who used to come on with a dagger and throw it on the stage. If it stuck, landed on its point, she'd go on with the act and sing. If it didn't she wouldn't. Walk right off.

"She was pretty expert at tossing the old dagger, so it usually landed right — they ain't ever too crazy. And on account of the dagger always landing right, I never find out what it's all about for weeks. Until one night she up cold and walks out on herself. On an opening night at the Palace, too, where she's being featured. And when I come galloping back, red in the face to ask her what the hell, she answers me very haughty: 'Go ask the dagger. He tell you.'

"Well, that's another story, and not so good, either. About this night in Gabbo's room, as I was saying. I took in Gabbo's little act with the dummy, and said nothing.

"But I started making a few inquiries the next day, and I find out plenty. I find out that this nutty give-and-take with the dummy is just a regular routine for Gabbo. That he keeps up a more or less steady conversation with the dummy like he was a kid brother. And not only that, but that this idiotic dummy is the only human being — or whatever you call him — that Gabbo ever says more than hello to. Barring me, of course.

"Look" — and Ferris snorted — "can you imagine him sitting at that table now and looking at me and pretending he doesn't know me? And, what's more, that I don't know him? On account he's got a nine-dollar toupée on. Well, that's part of the story, and I'll come to it.

"The way I figured it at the time — and I may be wrong — was that Gabbo was such an egotist that he could only talk to himself. You know, there's lots of hoofers, for instance, who won't watch anybody but themselves dance. They stand in front of a mirror — for diversion, mind you — and do their stuff. And applaud it. That's vaudeville for you.

"So I figured Gabbo that way. That he was so stuck on himself he got a big kick out of talking to himself.

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That's what he was doing, of course, when he held these powwows with Jimmy.

"As you can imagine, it kind of interested me. I got so I'd always try to drop around Gabbo's dressing room whenever I had time, just to catch this loony business with the dummy. I didn't think it exactly funny, you know, and it never made me laugh. I guess it was just morbid curiosity on my part. Anyway, I sort of become part of the family.

"The fights they used to have — Gabbo and this crazy dummy; fighting all the time. Usually about the act. Gabbo sore as the devil at Jimmy if anything went wrong with the turn — if one of the gags missed fire, for instance, he'd accuse him of stalling, laying down on the job, and honest to God, once he sailed into the damn thing because he was sure it wasn't getting enough sleep. Believe me or not, they were as quarrelsome as a team of hoofers.

"And after I got used to these spats — you know you can get used to anything — I got to thinking of Jimmy almost the way Gabbo did. I got to imagining it was him answering back — squealing, kidding, and swearing. And not Gabbo talking with his stomach — or whatever it is ventriloquists talk with.

"But with all this fighting between them, you could see that Gabbo had a soft spot for Jimmy. He fed him milk. There was a can or something fitted up inside. That's where the milk went.

"For instance, just to show you the pretty side of the picture, about three months after I change the billing and take Jimmy's name off the one-sheets, Gabbo arrives in my office with a demand that I put the picture back and the name too, in twice as big lettering as before.

"And one other time he comes to me, Gabbo does, and says Jimmy isn't getting enough money. Well, as you can imagine, this sounds a bit phoney. There's such a thing as carrying a gag too far, is my first reaction. But so help me, he meant it. And he won't go on with the act unless I come through.

"Well, I learned long before that it don't pay to win arguments with the talent. It's worse than winning an argument with your own wife. Costs you more.

"So I finally control my temper and asks, 'How much of a raise does Jimmy want?'

" 'Five dollars a week more,' says Gabbo. And Gabbo was pulling down four hundred dollars for the act; so you can see the whole thing was on the square — asking a raise for Jimmy, I mean. Then he explains to me that he has been paying Jimmy ninety-five dollars per week right along, and he wants to make it an even hundred because Jimmy has been working very hard and so on.

"So much for that. Here's where the plot thickens. About three weeks or so after this conference, I get wind of the fact that Gabbo has fallen for a dame; and that the thing has be-

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come quite a joke among the talent.

"I can hardly believe my ears. Gabbo never looked at a dame ever since he was on the circuit. The loneliest, stuck-up professor I'd ever known. He used to walk around like Kaiser Wilhelm. Grand, gloomy, and peculiar. And with a mustache. Don't look now — he's shaved it off. Part of the disguise. But in those days it was his pride and joy.

"Well, the next thing I heard about his love's young dream is from Gabbo himself in person. He comes back to New York, and comes walking into the office with the information that he is adding a woman to his act; Mlle. Rubina. I look at him and say, 'What for, for the love of Pete? What do you need a jane in the act for, and why Rubina?'

" 'For the water,' he answers. 'To bring on the glass of water which I drink. And take it off.' And he scowls at me as if to say, 'Do you want to make anything out of it?' And when I nod sort of dumbly, he goes on: 'She is willing to join me for a hundred dollars per week.'

"Well, this is pretty nuts. Rubina was a bowlegged wench working in a juggling act. Fetched plates and Indian clubs for Allen and Allen. And worth all of fifty cents a year as talent. Not even a looker. But go argue with Gabbo. I tried a little taffy about his going over so much better alone — that is, with his pal Jimmy to help him out. But he waves his hand at me, pulls his mustache, and begins to jump up and down with excitement.

"So I agree, and he then becomes the gentleman. He'll stand for a fifty dollar cut in his salary — that is twenty-five dollars out of his take and twenty-five out of Jimmy's. That's the way he puts it. And I should kick in with the other fifty for Rubina's graft.

"That's how this Rubina joined the act.

"I went over to catch it three nights later and see what was going on. I came right in the middle of Gabbo's turn. There he stood, with Jimmy sitting on the table, and this peroxide Rubina all dressed up in red plush knickerbockers with green bows on the sides of the knees, hovering around and 'acting' — registering surprise and delight every time the dummy made a wisecrack. It almost ruined the turn.

"But what I noticed most was that Gabbo was a changed man. His whole attitude was different. He wasn't making his usual goo-goo eyes at the audience or shooting over personality — which had been his long suit.

"He was all wrapped up in Rubina, staring at her like a sick puppy with the heaves. And calling her over every half-minute, between gags, and demanding another glass of water. And bowing like an idiot whenever she handed it to him. He must have drunk fourteen glasses of water during the act.

"And that, my friend, was just the beginning. The circuit thought it a big joke — Gabbo's crush on Rubina.

"And what everybody considered

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the funniest part of the racket was that Rubina was as fond of Gabbo as if he had been a rattlesnake. She never had anything but a sneer and a wisecrack for him, and, when he got too fancy with his bow, just a low-down scowl. She would have none of him. Why, God only knows. Except perhaps that he was a little too nutty even for her. And she was no picker, believe me.

"In about two months things begin to grow serious. It seems, according to reports which come in from every town on the circuit, that Gabbo has carried his anger against Jimmy to such lengths that he'll hardly talk to him on the stage, mind you. Keeps sneering at his jokes and trying to trip him up, and bawling him out in front of the audience.

"And then, after the act, he sits him up on the table in his dressing room and starts in hurling curses at the dummy and screaming. It scares people out of their wits. The actors backstage, I mean. You know, it's kind of woozy to pass a room where you know a man is alone and hear him yelling at the top of his voice. And, what's more, answering himself.

"And all this excitement, it seems, is due to jealousy. That was the whole point. It seems that this Rubina valentine had tumbled to the fact that Gabbo treated Jimmy like a living person. So, out of sheer cussedness, she had taken to patting Jimmy's wooden cheeks on the stage. Or winking at him during the turn. And the blow-off came, I learned, when she slipped Jimmy a caramel as he was sitting in Gabbo's lap in the dressing room. This was just downright morbid viciousness on Rubina's part.

"After that there was nothing could straighten the thing out. As soon as Gabbo lands in town, I go backstage with him. He's in his dressing room, and he stands there — the turn being over — just motioning me away and raging at this maniac dummy of his.

" 'That is the kind of a one you are,' he screams. 'That is the way you show your gratitude. After all I've done for you. Trying to steal the woman I love from me. The woman I love above everything.' And then I listen to Jimmy answer, and, so help me, for a minute I thought it was that damned wooden image speaking.

" 'My life is my own,' says Jimmy, squealing wilder than usual. 'I can do what I want. And I'll ask you to mind your own business, you big tub of lard.'

"At these words Gabbo jumped into the air and pulled his hair out in handfuls.

" 'Viper,' he howled at the dummy.

" 'Idiot,' Jimmy squeals back at him.

"What could I do? I just sneaked off and left them calling each other names like a pair of fishwives. I crossed my fingers and hoped that the act wouldn't split up — that's where I was chiefly concerned, you understand.

"Then came the second stage. I don't know whatever got into this Rubina dame. She'd never pulled down more than thirty dollars a week

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in her life. And here she was getting a hundred. For doing nothing. And yet she writes me a long misspelled letter, that she's quitting the act on Saturday and for me to find someone to take her place.

"I was of course tickled silly. Fifty dollars is fifty dollars. And, besides, I sort of liked Gabbo and I felt this Rubina was dangerous to him. It's best for lunatics to steer clear of women — or for anybody for that matter.

"But my satisfaction didn't last long. I get a telephone call the following Monday to hurry over to the Bronx where Gabbo is opening — being starred, mind you. My great ventriloquist, it seems, has gone out of his head.

"I get there just as the bill has started. Gabbo has just told the manager he won't go on. He won't act. He knows what he owes to his art and his public, but would rather be torn by wild horses than to step out on the stage alongside of that black imp of hell — Jimmy.

"And as he says these things he walks up and down in his dressing room, cursing Jimmy and glowering at him like a maniac. They're having an out-and-out bust-up, like a team. Calling each other hams, among other less repeatable things.

"The house manager and all the actors were frightened silly at the noise. But I was used to Gabbo by this time, and began trying to calm him down. But I got no chance to get in a word edgewise — what with the way these two were going after each other. Gabbo thundering in his baritone and that damned dummy squealing back at him in his falsetto.

"I saw at once that Gabbo had really sort of gone over the edge. This time there was a murderous rage in his voice. And in Jimmy's, too.

"I got so mixed up I began to worry — for Gabbo. Dummy or no dummy, I began to think that . . .

"Well, anyway, it appears that Rubina, his adored, the light of his life, has flown. And Gabbo's idea, nutty as it sounds, is that Jimmy knows where she is. That she and Jimmy have framed against him. That Jimmy, the dirty hound, has stolen her love. Can you beat it?

"There's no use trying to reason under such circumstances. Any more than getting logical with a man who has the D.T.'s. Gabbo won't go on with the act. And he don't. He's through. And I stand still, and say nothing, and watch him hurl Jimmy into his black case, grab it under his arm, and start out with it.

"And I follow him out of the theater. He starts walking peculiarly, like a man half stewed. Then I see that he's doubling on his tracks, trying to elude somebody. Me, I figured. But I kept on. Finally he goes into a store, and I watch him through the window. It's a hardware store, and he stays in there for five minutes, and then comes out and makes a beeline for the hotel.

"I got to his room almost as soon

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as he did. But the door was locked. I stood there listening, and all of a sudden I hear screaming. In English, French, and several other languages. I swear to you, it scared me silly.

"I started banging on the door. But it's no use. Finally I beat it down after the manager. We're back in five minutes. And we open the door.

"Well, the room is silent and empty.

"I stood staring for a minute. Then I saw something. The floor is covered with pieces of wood. Splinters, sticks. It's Jimmy. Chopped to pieces, cut to smithereens. He'd murdered Jimmy, honest to God.

"We looked all around the room, and found the ax he'd bought in the hardware store. And then found that he'd lit out through the window. Made his getaway down the fire-escape.

"And that's the last trace we could pick up of him. We hunted high and low. I had two men scouring the town. But he was gone, leaving everything behind him. Fled — like a murderer, a murderer fleeing from justice, so help me.

"I gathered Jimmy up and put him in a piece of wrapping paper. That's how confused I was. And I carried him to the office and finally threw him in the wastebasket. And then I went home, and was unable to sleep for six nights.

"That's almost the end of the story. Except that two years ago I come in here one night after the show, and I see somebody familiar sitting at a table. I can't place him for a few minutes, and then all of a sudden I see it's Gabbo — Gabbo the Great — with a gray toupée and the mustache shaved.

"I rush over to him and begin talking. And he stared at me — highty-tighty like.

" 'My name,' he says, 'is Mr. Lawrence. I am sorry you make a mistake.'

"Well, I'm not unusually dense, and as I stood there it dawned on me that Gabbo didn't want to be known. That he'd come back after fleeing from justice for eight years — come back disguised and with a different name, so that the police wouldn't pick him up for his great crime.

"And there he sits," Ferris looked at me with a mirthless smile. "Everybody knows his story in this place, and we all kid him along, calling him Mr. Lawrence and keeping his secret. Yeah, and when we get funny we call him the Ax Murderer. You know, just a gag among ourselves.

"Wait till he leaves" — Ferris picked up his glass — "and I'll take you over to the table where he's sitting."

This struck me as a rather empty offer.

"What for?" I inquired.

"So you can see what Jimmy looked like."

Ferris suddenly laughed. "He always draws a picture of that damned idiotic dummy on the tablecloth — every night."

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Much has been written of Edgar Wallace's prolific and phenomenal popularity, and as was to be expected, many exaggerations have crept in to help build the Wallace legend. For example, it has been said that when he died in 1932 (in Hollywood, of all places!) the Wallace estate consisted of £150,000 — in debts! That we can believe, knowing the Wallace penchant for the ponies; but it has also been said that in a mere two years' time Mr. Wallace's continuing royalties not only wiped out all his debts but paid free-and-clear dividends to his heirs. It's a tall story — but Edgar Wallace's whole life was a tall story.

However, where there's smoke there's fact. Wallace was *a prodigious producer. It is a matter of recorded history that 'way back in 1928, before the days of monumental reprint sales, before the era of the 25-cent best-seller, Mr. Wallace sold in a single year no less than 5,000,000 copies of his books throughout the world!*

That too we believe, and in the light of that highwater mark, you would think that every one of Wallace's books must have been printed both in England and the United States, to say nothing of Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, and South America. But it is not so. One of Edgar Wallace's finest volumes of detective short stories — a book worthy to stand beside the J. G. Reeder series — never appeared in this country, at least so far as publishing records indicate. That book is THE ORATOR, *about Inspector O. Rater. Long, long ago we brought you one of the Orator's exploits — "The Man Next Door," in EQMM, September 1942 — and now we present another fine example of Rater's ratiocination, another story by the man who for all his prodigal performance in print can still be called upon, fourteen years after his death, to produce a "brand-new" story for American readers.*

THE OLD LADY WHO CHANGED HER MIND

by EDGAR WALLACE

MR. RATER never took a job out of the hands of a subordinate unless there was a very urgent reason. The subordinate in this case was a humble police constable, and his job was to remove Mrs. Schtalmeister from the unconscious body of a rent collector. That the oblivion of this unfortunate man was entirely due to the stone jug this vigorous old lady had wielded was a tragic fact, for in an unguarded moment the disgruntled collector had threatened eviction unless the rent was paid. Possibly he

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was not too well acquainted with the tenants of 79 Keller Row and their peculiar methods — he most certainly did not know Mrs. Schtalmeister and her reputation, or he would not have turned away even as she was reaching for the pitcher.

She was nearer sixty than fifty, a tall and powerful woman with the grip of a navvy, and she had behind and about her the moral support of Keller Row and a people to whom rent collectors, school inspectors and policemen were anathema.

It was when a sympathizer of the old lady took a hand and a pick handle to deal with the interfering officer that Inspector Rater, a chance and interested spectator, decided that the moment had arrived when he might interfere.

It was he who hauled Mrs. Schtalmeister from the prostrate collector, his hard fist that persuaded the sympathizer to retire from view, and finally he who lifted the virago bodily on to the police ambulance and helped strap her; and when, half an hour later, Mrs. Schtalmeister was explaining in broken Dutch that she had been the victim of an unjustifiable attack, it was he who spoke tersely of her past record.

She was a grim, raw woman, the terror of her neighborhood; for fifteen years she had dominated the Swedes, the Dutchmen and the Scotsmen who for some extraordinary reason had congregated in Keller Row, Greenwich. They were seafaring people mostly; their men signed on at irregular intervals in the ships that go down Thames river from Victoria Docks. In the old days they lived in Poplar and Wapping, but once the County Council had driven a tunnel between Blackwall and East Greenwich it was inevitable that there should be a seepage of waste southward.

Seven lascar brothers lived in one house; No. 43 held a shifting population of Chinese; a veritable German who had been interned during the war was established at No. 15; there were Norwegians, an Irish family, and at least one Finn in that *cul de sac* which ends blankly at the wall of a shipbreaking yard.

To Keller Row one must surely return, since it was the scene of one of the most remarkable cases that was ever handled by the Orator. For the moment, here is Mrs. Schtalmeister fulminating against the law and its representatives, but growing more coherent every minute.

"For fifteen year' I lif in dis street — no quarrels haf I mit anyones. I lif like a lady — six pound a week I haf by my son. . . . Nor bad tempers I haf: once, yes, in '85 it is true. My brudder an' I quarrels, but never since . . ."

And then, in perfect innocence, quite unconscious of the amazing breach of the law which she revealed, rather proud than otherwise of her deed, she told a story which Mr. Rater heard apparently unmoved.

The offense was an old one, and in reality a technical one. It was not a matter in which he cared to move,

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though, being extremely curious, he did confirm the woman's statement a week or two afterwards.

At the Greenwich Police Court on the following morning the episode of Mrs. Schtalmeister ended with a fine and a horrific warning from the magisterial bench. She paid the fine and her rent — she had money enough but was by nature miserly — and went back to Keller Row, where she died in the winter of '23.

The Orator did not know of her passing: he was not interested in people who were law-abiding. He was at the moment engaged in a jewel robbery in Chislehurst and it was rather a complicated case, for, although the thieves were caught, their arrest had been delayed just long enough to allow the fourteen big diamonds in Lady Teighmount's old-fashioned tiara to disappear. The setting was found, but since the setting had only its Early Victorian value, the Orator was not elated.

"I'm tellin' you the gospel, Mr. Rater," said Harry Selt, the principal brigand. "I duffed the sparklers with a fence whose name I don't know: he works for a Big Feller on the Continent. All I got was two hundred, and that splits four ways. It's no good me tellin' you a lie, Mr. Rater; you know how many stand in on a conjure like this."

No more information than this could be had from Harry, which was unfortunate, for Lady Teighmount, in addition to being a very rich woman, was a family connection of a Cabinet Minister. This exalted man sent for the Orator, and he proved to be very human.

"I am asking a special favor, Mr. Rater," he said. "My aunt is terribly keen on getting those diamonds back. They were given by her husband in the 'seventies or in some prehistoric year, and she attaches a sentimental value to them. Happily she's never known that diamond giving was the old boy's hobby. Now isn't it possible for you to get hold of some underworld gentleman who could lead you to them? She's willing to pay two thousand pounds and no questions asked ——"

"Which is an illegal inducement," said Mr. O. Rater soberly.

"I know — I know. The point is, will you, as an act of kindness to me, go out of your official way to recover those stones?"

The Orator nodded. He felt that he had already said too much.

No receiver is to be approached directly, especially by a police officer. The Orator began his tortuous investigations by interviewing one Alf Barkin, a dealer in dogs. It was a long interview and Mr. Barkin said very little. Every few seconds he shook his head and said: "I don't know nothing about it, Mr. Rater," or: "If I knew I'd tell you, Mr. Rater," but in the end Alfred arranged to accompany the detective that night to a small drinking shop in Deptford, where they met Joseph Greid, a dealer in furniture, who knew a man "slightly" (he hastened to qualify the extent of

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his acquaintanceship) who knew another man who might possibly know a friend of somebody else who in his turn could perhaps get into touch with a friend of the receivers.

For twelve days the Orator pursued his patient way. As was his practice, he said little, listened much and alertly. For he must trap certain vital statements carelessly dropped into the streams of verbiage, must sort essentials from non-essentials, unravel cunningly involved sentences.

In the end he made a journey to Brussels, and there he met by appointment M. Heinrich Dissel.

M. Dissel came to his sitting room at the hotel, a stiff, youngish man with large horn-rimmed spectacles, rather untidy yellow hair and a stiff little furry moustache. He clicked his heels and bowed from the waist, before he offered a cotton-gloved hand.

"Your letter I have had, m'sieu. Be pleased to be seated before I myself, sir."

He put down the big black portfolio he was carrying, hitched the knees of his well-creased trousers, and sat down on the edge of a chair, exposing as he did so a length of white sock above his brilliantly yellow boot.

"I am merchant and agent, yes? But diamonds seldom. Now in Antwerpen I know several mans who buy, sell diamonds, sometimes goodly bought, sometimes badly bought. Yes, I know them. My brudder in London sent you? He is a good brudder but not amity — how shall you say? — friendtly. We quarrels, make a big row. He gives me plenty money and I love it — piquet, cheval de course, you understand? So we make the big row and no more do we be friendts. When I go to London I telephone, but he say 'Not to home,' so we are not friendts."

He beamed as though his estrangement with his ill-used brother was the greatest joke in the world. The Orator moved uneasily in his chair: such undulations of discomfort were a preliminary to speech.

"That's all right, M'sieur Dissel; I'm not very much interested in your family troubles. You were good enough to answer my letter about — um — a certain matter. Do I understand that you can buy back these diamonds?"

M. Dissel's smile was one of triumph. He dived his hand into the inside of his tightly fitting jacket and brought out a fat leather case. This he banged on the table and unfolded with a flourish. From a wad of letters and cards he fished out a packet wrapped in white tissue paper, which, with a deft flick of his finger, he unrolled. The diamonds came into view three by three as he came to the cotton-wool lining.

"Here is!" he said. "For these I pay two hond'erd thirty thousand francs. Of profit I make thirty thousan' francs — I will not pretend I make no profit."

The Orator walked to the door of his bedroom and called in the expert he had brought from London. One by one the stones were examined. Henry

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Dissel was an amused spectator. In the end Mr. O. Rater counted out twenty one-hundred-pound notes and the Belgian folded them carefully and put them in his pocket.

"I suppose, M'sieur Dissel, you are not prepared to give me the name of the man from whom you made this purchase?"

M. Dissel shrugged and shook his head.

"He may be good mans or bad mans," he said. "If I speak him by name, there should be plenty troubles and questions and reclamations, and then he say: 'You, M'sieur Dissel, you give me plenty nonsense. Again I will not deal with you,' isn't it?"

"Where does your brother carry on business in London?" asked the Orator at parting.

"Theodor has the bureau in Victoria Street. Nomber nine hondred sixty," replied M. Dissel. "But we are not good friendts. That is sad and against Christian teaching."

The Orator frowned.

"Theodor? What is his other name?"

"Theodor Louis Hazeborn — mine is Heinrich Frederick Dinehem."

The Orator looked at him blankly.

"Oh!" he said.

Another man would have said much more, but Chief Inspector Rater was sparing of speech: therefore was he nicknamed by his sardonic peers.

M. Dissel was a Belgian subject and had been engaged in business for ten years, occupying a small office on the Boulevard Militaire. It was a very untidy office, the Orator discovered when he made a visit. Above the desk was a most ornate diploma in a golden frame. It testified to an athletic accomplishment of M. Heinrich Dissel.

He was, as he said, an agent, representing a number of unimportant textile houses, English and German and American. For these he travelled a great deal. He was a member of a club where play was very high, but, although he was a gambler, nothing else was known against him. Occasionally he dealt in precious stones, antiques and even house property. There had been no complaint against him, and he was evidently the sort of man whom international thieves might use as an innocent cover for them in their negotiations.

"Theodor Louis Hazeborn!" The name occurred and recurred to Mr. Rater all the way back to London.

The day he arrived he had the dubious satisfaction of restoring the missing diamonds to their owner — and Lady Teighmount was in an irascible mood. She grudged (she said) every penny of the reward: she thought that if the police could bring about their return for money they could have secured the stones without money; she hinted darkly that she did not exclude the possibility of the police in general and Chief Inspector Rater having shared the reward.

The Orator listened and yet did not listen. He was thinking of M. Theodor Louis Hazeborn Dissel and of M. Heinrich Frederick Dinehem Dissel.

Going back to his suburban home

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that night, the Orator suddenly said:

"It is crazy!"

"Who is crazy?" asked his startled fellow passenger — for Mr. Rater had made his cryptic pronouncement in a railway carriage.

"Everybody," said the Orator with great calmness.

His companion drew back to a corner seat and located the alarm cord.

But it *was* crazy — this theory which was beginning to shape in the Orator's mind. The craziest notion that any man could conceive.

Patiently he began a fresh enquiry, exploring new avenues that radiated from old crimes. For three weeks he sought interviews with jewel thieves who were behind bars. A dozen prisons were visited, and at the end of his investigations he uncovered a skilfully hidden path that led from London to Belgium. Along this path furtive intermediaries had passed, carrying the proceeds of a score of robberies big and little. Not always did it lead to Brussels; sometimes it branched off to Liége, sometimes it stopped short at Ostend, but always at the end of it was a mysterious somebody to be found in a café or a beer-hall or place less reputable, and always the rendezvous was designated in London.

"This was how it was done, Mr. Rater" (the speaker was a fence serving out his sentence in Maidstone Gaol). "When the boys got a good haul it was as certain as anything one of the big fences would be called up on the 'phone and told where the stuff could be sold. I don't know where this bird got his information, but he got it. And then one of our runners would take it over the water. The money was always good. I've taken stuff over myself."

"You never saw the foreign fence?"

"Never. You'd get to the café and then somebody would come in and say 'The boss is outside.' He'd be waiting round the corner in a cab. He'd go through the swag like lightning with an electric lamp, name the price and pay it on the spot."

The Orator did not ask how the London agent of the fence came to know who held the stolen property. He knew the underworld well enough to know that in certain sets such matters are common knowledge. He knew too that most receivers and the bigger of the thieves had houses of call to which they might be telephoned. The crazy idea was no longer crazy.

Two days after this he had a whole day to himself and he took a busman's holiday — he called on the brother of the volatile Heinrich.

Heinrich's office in Brussels had been one miserable room, untidily furnished. The office of the industrious Theodor was a place of polished mahogany and shining brass. On the ground-glass panel of the door was a neatly painted announcement:

THEODOR DISSEL
ENGINEER

He was a tall, carefully dressed man, clean-shaven, rather exquisite, thought the Orator. His hair was brushed carefully back from his high forehead, he

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wore a monocle, his linen (in contrast to his brother's) was immaculate. His English was faultless.

A girl secretary showed Mr. Rater into the private office where Theodor sat at a desk so amazingly neat and orderly that it seemed impossible that it could have been used. Theodor bowed from his hips, a little ceremoniously — it was the only suggestion of his foreign origin.

"I have an uncomfortable feeling that you have come to see me about my brother," he said with a rueful smile. "It isn't exactly a premonition, because I happen to know that you interviewed him a few days ago — in fact he wrote and told me, and although he did not tell me the object of your call, I am just a little uneasy."

"Why?" asked the Orator bluntly.

M. Theodor Dissel paced up and down the room, his hands in the pockets of his well-creased trousers.

"Well . . ." he hesitated, "you will not expect me to say anything disparaging of Heinrich — that would be unnatural. He is a wild sort of fellow, absolutely unstable, but I do not think bad at heart. When a man is as careless with money as he is, there is always a likelihood that he might get himself into serious trouble. Is it some trading transaction — some debt he has contracted which he has not paid? I am certain he would do nothing fraudulent ——"

His manner betrayed a natural anxiety. It was exactly the attitude the Orator would have expected in a worried brother.

"If it is money . . ." Theodor shrugged his shoulders helplessly. "I can do little. I have already helped him to the extent of fifteen thousand pounds. That money I shall never receive in his lifetime."

"There is no question of fraud" — the Orator spoke slowly — "not the kind of fraud you mean. Your brother is a Belgian national, isn't he?" and, when Theodor nodded: "And you are British — naturalized?"

"Yes," said Theodor quietly. "I am married in England since the war. If my brother is married I do not know." He shrugged again. "He is the kind of man who is likely to contract alliances of a less permanent character. I will be frank with you — he is a great trouble to me."

The Orator said nothing. He stroked his face, and in his large, pathetic, dog-like eyes seemed to be reflected something of the other's care.

"Whatever you told me of Heinrich I should, alas! believe. He has certain friends who are not ——" His gesture expressed the limits of disparagement.

"Ever heard of his being engaged in the jewellery business?"

Theodor frowned.

"Jewellery business?" He spoke slowly. "I did not know that he was in that trade. And yet, when he was in London last, he hinted that he had some dealings with a man in London — a Mr. Devereux. I met Devereux once, a rather unpleasant looking man — not the kind one would imagine was a jeweller. In fact I disliked his appearance so much that when he

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called on me after my brother's return to Belgium I sent a message to him that I was busy and could not see him."

The Orator thought for a long time.

"Quite right," he said at last. "Devereux is a pretty bad man. I know him."

He went home to his lodgings and puzzled things out.

"Crazy idea!" was the sum of his conclusions.

It was a problem that could be marked *Shelved for development.* The Orator accordingly laid his mystery in a handy place.

It was a fortnight later that Heinrich Dissel stepped gingerly out of the Brussels train at Ostend station. It was a warm and heavy September day and a white mist lay upon a glassy sea. He engaged a cabin aft, a "cabin of luxury," where he deposited his one piece of luggage, a small valise, and ordered lunch to be served. He was, apparently, a little lame, for he walked painfully with the aid of a stick when he made an appearance upon the deck.

The mist held to Dover, growing thicker as the English coast was approached. The boat, guided by the guns and siren of Dover Harbor, came slowly towards the harbor's mouth, an hour late.

It was when she was turning — for mail boats go into harbor stern first — that a second-class passenger heard a cry for help. Heinrich Dissel had been seen hobbling towards the stern of the ship; had also been seen (and warned by a quartermaster) sitting perilously on the rail over the stern.

The cry was followed by a splash, and rushing to the side, a steward saw Heinrich's walking stick floating out of sight, but saw nothing of the man. A boat was instantly lowered, but though the sailors recovered his hat, Heinrich had disappeared from sight.

That night Mr. Rater read in the stop press of an evening newspaper:

PASSENGER FALLS OVERBOARD FROM CROSS-CHANNEL STEAMER

A passenger, believed to be M. Heinrich Dissel of Brussels, fell overboard from the mail boat Princess Josephine as the steamer was entering Dover Harbor. The body has not yet been recovered.

"Well, well!" said the Orator, unmoved by the tragedy.

The body of Heinrich Dissel had not been found when the Orator paid his visit of condolence on the stricken brother.

He discovered M. Theodor examining the contents of the small valise that the Dover police had handed to the dead man's relatives.

"I am bewildered," said Theodor, shaking his head. "I have just been on the telephone to Brussels, but apparently there is not the slightest reason for suicide. His affairs were prospering, everything in his office was in order — so far as the poor fellow's affairs could be in order — and he had over a thousand pounds in his bank. The other day he lamed himself playing tennis, and I can only sup-

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pose that a sudden lurch of the ship brought the weight of his body on to his injured ankle . . ."

"Insured?" asked Mr. Rater.

Theodor nodded slowly.

"Yes — I had forgotten that. When I paid his debts I insisted that he should insure with an English company. It was perhaps a little heartless, but it was necessary that I should have security."

"For fifteen thousand?"

"I think that was the sum. But the money is nothing — I am overwhelmed with grief at this terrible tragedy. Poor Heinrich ——"

"Insured in the name of Dissel?" interrupted the Orator.

M. Theodor hesitated.

"No. Our family name is ——"

"Schtalmeister," said the Orator, nodding. "I know."

Only for a second was Theodor disconcerted.

"We changed our names by deed ——" he began.

"I know," said the Orator. "You had two uncles, didn't you? One was called Theodor Louis Hazeborn and one called Heinrich Frederick Dinehem. Your mother named you Heinrich Frederick Dinehem a week after you were born. A month later she moved into another district in London and had a violent quarrel with your uncle Heinrich. *So she went and registered your birth all over again!*"

M. Theodor was white but silent.

"You started life with two names and you've been carrying on the good work. With a clever little mustache you were Heinrich in Brussels and Theodor in London — a receiver of stolen property in both places. When your mother changed her mind, she gave us a lot of trouble."

"You are mad," gasped Theodor agitatedly. "My brudder ——"

"You are your brother — and that falling overboard was pretty easy for you, wasn't it? I saw a diploma in your Brussels office — long distance swimming, eh? You got ashore and had a car waiting, I'll bet. You're the bird I've been waiting for — the bird in two places at once. Get your hat."

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GUESS WHO?

by TALBOT HATCH

He is not a criminologist; nor a detective; nor a policeman. He does not use insufflators or test tubes. He does not collect things. He is not a savant. He does not possess nor does he lay claim to a vast fund of esoteric knowledge. He is neither hard-boiled nor blasé. In truth, he is a very commonplace, ordinary sort of a fellow, as you shall see. Yet persons with criminal intent would do well to forego their transgressions while within his immediate vicinity. For, like Max Carrados, he has a profound knowledge of human nature; like Father Brown, he can read the most baffling riddles; and, like the Northwest Mounted, he always gets his man.

Ordinary, did we say? Well, judge for yourself. Although possessed of a closetful of good clothes you seldom see him garbed in other than worn, grey corduroy trousers, flannel shirt and a wool-lined canvas coat with many pockets. Either rubber or hunting boots encase his feet and on his head, tipped at a rakish angle, will be found a well-worn Stetson or an old yachting cap. He usually walks with his shoulders hunched and his head thrust forward, his trousers and flannel shirt flopping as though anxious to catch up with his spare body.

His frame is tall and lean, as is his face which is so tanned by exposure that its lines and wrinkles do not show. His mouth is wide with a humorous twist about the corners and his eyes, which are deep-set and blue, twinkle disconcertingly. As a slight concession to individuality he has a little mole on his cheek. On occasion he smokes a pipe but he likes to chew tobacco, his preference in this regard being Sailor's Pal Cut Plug. This latter habit, coupled with his trick of pronouncing no more syllables of a word than are absolutely necessary, make him frequently unintelligible to those who do not know him. In truth his speech would be impossible for a student of phonetics to record on paper; it resembles no other dialect in the world. He wastes no time on final g's or t's, his r's are ahs, and his a's are so flat that you couldn't get under them with a crowbar. He likes to quote old proverbs, and when he demands action has a fine quarterdeck bellow, but when he begins to purr, you can be sure that he has things well in hand.

His age, long the cause of frequent conjectural inquiry, is little clarified by his own admission that he is "old again as half." Certainly it must have spanned a generous number of years for it is said of him that he has been everywhere, seen everyone, and done everything. Also, as is frequently added, "he has never been done."

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As steward, cook or ordinary seaman he has sailed the seven seas in every type of ship, his first voyage having been made on one of the last of the clipper ships, and his last as a mate of a tramp steamer. Now settled in his home town he is the cherished friend and man Friday of that town's principal tycoon, a manufacturer of custom-built automobiles.

He is looked upon with critical eye because he belongs to no church and rarely attends any service outside of the Christmas Eve celebrations to which he goes and lustily sings hymns. He is neither a Mason, a Bison nor an Elk. But his townsmen know that when a garageman pronounces a car fit for the junk heap he can rejuvenate it. He himself drives (usually at top speed) a special super de luxe custom roadster which looks like a centipede on wheels — very shiny and rakish — which he calls "The Monster."

His major activities are confined to a region rich in the euphony of quaintly named villages and landmarks — Weehisit, Wellfleet, Sketicket Bay, Billingsgate Island and Quanomet Bluffs. Not so euphonious, but very apt indeed, are the terms in which he is accorded public recognition, he not infrequently being hailed as the Hayseed Sleuth, the Codfish Sherlock and the Homespun Jack-Of-All-Trades, all of them good resounding titles for —

GUESS WHO?

(*Solution on page 119*)

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FOURTH-PRIZE WINNER: KENNETH MILLAR

In a recent issue of EQMM we wrote briefly on the terse, tough, 'tec tale more commonly referred to as the hardboiled detective story. There is no doubt that the Hammett-Daly-Nebel-Chandler species exerted a powerful and important influence on the whole genre, but for some time now it has seemed to us that the old "Black Mask" formula has been fading (except in the movies, but Hollywood is always behind, not ahead of, deep-rooted literary movements). It is our belief also that the sensationalism of the 7-minute-egg school has been tempered with the more enduring qualities of the intellectual approach, thus combining the best of both main avenues of technique. In a way this belief has been confirmed by the results of EQMM's first detective-story contest.

Of the 838 manuscripts received from detective-story writers all over the world, only a small percentage projected hard-fisted "realism." Most of the 838 stories came from American authors — so the small ratio of "toughies" seems indicative of the new trend, which is a half-turn away from hardboiledism. On the other hand, we should not leap to conclusions. Perhaps there is another explanation. It takes a finer degree of sheer writing ability, a finer edge of creative observation, to bring off a really successful hardboiled whodunit. That would mean that fewer writers make the grade, produce grade-A tough stuff. That, rather than a going-out-of-vogue, might account for the startling fact that only one of the fifteen prizewinners in EQMM's first contest is classifiable as a hardboiled detective story.

And even that one — Kenneth Millar's "Find the Woman" — is not a pure hardboileder. True, it presents in Rogers, the private dick, a Hammett-Chandler tough hombre; it offers a hard, realistic crime situation, heavily underlined with sex; it unfolds a plot sequence typical of the bone-hard school, stressing physical violence and action; it betrays the surface cynicism we have come to expect in the upperworld and underworld characters who people hardboiled stories; it emphasizes the tough talk and the brutal force-of-circumstance which clothe, in dialogue and development, the basic plot structure of the now accepted American form. And yet with all this, Kenneth Millar's story is not pure hardboiledism: its characters are not psychologically black-and-white, and there are undertones and overtones in "Find the Woman" not usually woven into the hard fabric of tough 'tecs.

A few facts about the author: Kenneth Millar became infected with the detective-story virus by exposure to his wife, Margaret Millar, author of

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WALL OF EYES, FIRE WILL FREEZE, *and* THE IRON GATES (*all published by Random House*). *At the time his prizewinning "Find the Woman" was written, Mr. Millar was an Ensign in the U. S. Navy, on active duty; he airmailed his manuscript to EQMM from the South Pacific theatre of war.*

Kenneth Millar's first book was THE DARK TUNNEL (*Dodd, Mead*), *an excellent novel of suspense and pursuit in which the author "tried to treat a romantic and melodramatic plot in a realistic manner, with a hero who is not particularly heroic. . . ." Those are Mr. Millar's own words and we wonder if they don't describe his short story, "Find the Woman," much more accurately and pointedly than your Editor has. . . .*

FIND THE WOMAN

by KENNETH MILLAR

I HAD seen her before, and made a point of noticing her. I make a point of noticing people who make a thousand a week. I do that because a thousand a week is fifty thousand a year.

Mrs. Dreen did the national publicity for Tele-Pictures. She was forty and looked it, but there was electricity in her, plugged in to a secret source that time could never wear out. Look how high and tight I carry my body, her movements said. My hair is hennaed but comely, said her coiffure, inviting not to conviction but to suspension of disbelief. Her eyes were green and inconstant like the sea. They said what the hell.

She sat down by my desk and told me that her daughter had disappeared the day before, which was September the seventh.

"I was in Hollywood all day — we have an apartment there — and left her alone at the beach-house, about ten miles north of here. When I got home to the beach-house last night she was gone."

"Did you call the police?"

"It didn't occur to me. She's twenty-two and knows what she's doing, and apron strings don't become me." She smiled fiercely like a cat and moved her scarlet-taloned fingers in her narrow silk lap. "Anyway it was very late and frankly I was a trifle stewed. I went to bed. But when I woke up this morning it occurred to me that she might have drowned. I objected to it because she wasn't a strong swimmer, but she went in for solitary swimming. I think of the most dreadful things when I wake up in the morning."

"*Went* in for solitary swimming, Mrs. Dreen?"

" 'Went' slipped out, didn't it? I told you I think of dreadful things when I wake up in the morning."

"If she drowned you should be talk-

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ing to the police. They can arrange for dragging and such things. All I can give you is my sympathy."

As if to estimate the value of that commodity, her eyes flickered from my shoulders to my waist and up again to my face. "The Santa Barbara police are what you might expect in a town of this size. You see, I've heard about you, Mr. Rogers."

"My initial fee is one hundred dollars. After that I charge people according to how much I think I can get out of them."

From a bright black bag she gave me five twenties. "Naturally, I'm conscious of publicity angles. My daughter retired a year ago when she married—"

"Twenty-one is a good age to retire."

"From pictures, maybe you're right. But she could want to go back. And I have to look out for myself. It isn't true that there's no such thing as bad publicity. *I* don't know why Una went away."

"Una Sand?"

"I assumed you knew." She was a trifle pained by my ignorance of the details of her life. She didn't have to tell me that she had a feeling for publicity angles.

Though Una Sand meant less to me than Hecuba, I remembered the name and with it a sleek blonde who did more justice to her gowns than to the featured parts she had had during her year or two in the sun.

"Wasn't her marriage happy? I mean, isn't it?"

"You see how easy it is to slip into the past tense?" Mrs. Dreen smiled another fierce and purring smile, and her very white fingers fluttered in glee before her immobile body. "Her marriage is happy enough. Her Ensign is a personable young man, I suppose, handsome, naive, and passionate. He was runner-up in the State tennis championships the last year he played. And, of course, he's a flier."

What do you expect of a war marriage? she seemed to be saying. Permanence? Fidelity? The works?

"As a matter of fact," she went on, "it was thinking about Jack Ross, more than anything else, that brought me here to you. He's due back this week, and naturally"— like many unnatural people, she overused that adverb — "he'll expect her to be waiting for him. It'll be rather embarrassing for me if he comes home and I can't tell him where she's gone, or why, or with whom. You'd really think she'd leave a note."

"A minute ago Una was in the clutches of the cruel crawling foam. Now she's gone away with a romantic stranger. Who's she been knocking around with?"

"I consider possibilities, that is all. When I was Una's age —" Our gazes, mine as impassive as hers I hoped, met, struck no spark, and disengaged.

"I'm getting to know you pretty well," I said with the necessary smile, "but not the missing girl. My conversation is fair for an aging 4-F, but it isn't worth a hundred bucks."

"That grey over your ears is rather distinguished. Sort of a chinchilla effect."

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"Thanks. But shall we look at the scene of the crime?"

"There isn't any crime." She got up quickly and gracefully, a movement which at her age required self-control. An admirable and expert slut, I said to myself as I followed her high slim shoulders and tight-sheathed hips down the stairs to the bright street. But I felt a little sorry for the army of men who had warmed their hands at that secret electricity. I couldn't help wondering if her daughter Una was like that. When I did get to see Una, the current had been cut off; I learned about it only by the marks it left. It left marks.

I followed Mrs. Dreen's Buick convertible north out of Santa Barbara and for seven or eight miles along the coast highway. Then for a mile and a half along a winding dirt road through broken country to her private beach. The beach-house was set far back from the sea at the convergence of high brown bluffs which huddled over it like scarred shoulders. To reach it we had to drive along the beach for a quarter of a mile, detouring to the very edge of the sea around the southern bluff. The blue-white August dazzle of sun, sand and sea was like an arc-furnace. But there was some breeze from the sea, and a few clouds moved languidly inland over our heads. A little high plane was gambolling among them like a terrier in a hen yard.

"You have privacy," I said to Mrs. Dreen when we had parked.

"One tires of the goldfish role. When I lie out there in the afternoons I — forget I have a name." She pointed to a white raft in the middle of the cove which moved gently in the swells. "I simply take off my clothes and revert to protoplasm. *All* my clothes."

I cocked an eye at the plane which dropped, turning like an early falling leaf, swooped like a hawk, climbed like an aspiration.

She said with a laugh: "If they come too low I cover my face, of course."

Almost unconsciously, we had been moving towards the water. Nothing could have looked more innocent than the quiet blue cove, held in the curve of the white beach like a benign blue eye set in a serene brow. Even while I thought that, however, the colors shifted as a cloud passed over the sun. Sly green and cruel imperial purple veiled the blue. I felt the primitive fascination and terror of water. The tide had turned and was coming in. The waves came up towards us, gnawing eternally at the land like the toothless jaws of a blind unsightly animal.

For a moment Mrs. Dreen looked old and uncertain. "It's got funny moods, hasn't it? I hope she isn't in there."

"Are there bad currents here, or anything like that?"

"No. It's deep, though. It must be twenty feet under the raft. I could never bottom it there."

"I'd like to look at her room," I said. "It might tell us where she went, and even with whom. You'd know what clothes were missing?"

She laughed a little apologetically as she opened the door. "I used to dress

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my daughter, naturally. Not any more. Besides, more than half of her things must be in the Hollywood apartment. I'll try to help you, though."

It was good to step out of the vibrating brightness of the beach into shadowy stillness behind Venetian blinds. "I noticed that you unlocked the door," I said. "It's a big house with a lot of furniture in it. No servants?"

"I occasionally have to knuckle under to producers. But I won't to my employees. They'll be easier to get along with soon, now that the plane plants are shutting down."

We went to Una's room, which was light and airy in both atmosphere and furnishings. But it showed the lack of servants. Stockings, shoes, underwear, dresses, bathing suits, lipstick-smeared tissue, littered the chairs and the floor. The bed was unmade. The framed photograph on the night table was obscured by two empty glasses which smelt of highball, and flanked by overflowing ashtrays.

I moved the glasses and looked at the young man with the wings on his chest. Naive, handsome, passionate were words which suited the strong blunt nose, the full lips and square jaw, the wide proud eyes. For Mrs. Dreen he would have made a single healthy meal, and I wondered again if her daughter was a carnivore. At least the photograph of Jack Ross was the only sign of a man in her room. The two glasses could easily have been from separate nights. Or separate weeks, to judge by the condition of the room. Not that it wasn't an attractive room. It was like a pretty girl in disarray. But disarray.

We went through the room, the closets, the bathroom, and found nothing of importance, either positive or negative. When we had waded through the brilliant and muddled wardrobe which Una Ross had shed, I said:

"I guess I'll have to go to Hollywood. It would help me if you'd come along. It would help me more if you'd tell me who your daughter knew. Or rather who she liked, I suppose she knew everybody."

"I'd love to. Go along to Hollywood, I mean. I take it you haven't found anything in the room?"

"One thing I'm pretty sure of. Una didn't intentionally go away for long. Women usually just have one razor, and hers is in her bathroom."

"You notice things. Also Jack's picture. She only had the one, because she liked it best."

"That isn't so conclusive," I said. "I don't suppose you'd know whether there's a bathing suit missing?"

"I really couldn't say, she had so many. She was at her best in them."

"Still *was?*"

"I guess so, as a working hypothesis. Unless that hundred can buy evidence to the contrary."

"You didn't like your daughter much, did you?"

"No. I didn't like her father. And she was prettier than I."

"But not so intelligent?"

"Not as bitchy, you mean? She was bitchy enough. But I'm still worried

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about Jack. He loved her. Even if I didn't."

The telephone in the hall took the cue and began to ring. "This is Millicent Dreen," she said into it. "Yes, you may read it to me." A pause. " 'Kill the fatted calf, ice the champagne, turn down the sheets and break out the black silk nightie. Am coming home tomorrow'. Is that right?"

"Hold it a minute," she said then. "I wish to send an answer. To Ensign Jack Ross, USS Guam, CVE 173, Naval Air Station, Alameda — is that Ensign Ross's correct address? The text is: 'Dear Jack join me at the Hollywood apartment there is no one at the beach house. Millicent.' Repeat it, please . . . Right. Thank you."

She turned from the phone and collapsed in the nearest chair, not forgetting to arrange her legs symmetrically.

"So Jack is coming home tomorrow?" I said. "All I had before was no evidence. Now I have no evidence and until tomorrow."

She leaned forward to look at me. "How far can I trust you, I've been wondering?"

"Not so far. But I'm not a blackmailer. It's just that it's sort of hard, so to speak, to play tennis with the invisible man."

"The invisible man has nothing to do with this. I called him when Una didn't come home."

"All right," I said. "You're the one that wants to find Una. You'll get around to telling me. In the meantime, who else did you call?"

"Hilda Karp, Una's best friend — her *only* female friend."

"Where can I get hold of her?"

"She married Gray Karp, the agent, and resides, as they say, in the Karp residence."

Since Mrs. Dreen had another car in Hollywood, we drove down in my car. It was just over a hundred miles: just over a hundred minutes. Enroute the temperature rose ten degrees, which is one reason I live in Santa Barbara. But Mrs. Dreen's apartment in the Park-Wilshire was air-conditioned and equipped with a very elaborate bar. In spite of the fact that she was able to offer me Scotch, I tore myself away.

Mr. and Mrs. Karp had made the San Fernando Valley their home. Their ranch, set high on a plateau of rolling lawn, was huge and fashionably grotesque: Spanish Mission and Cubist with a dash of paranoia. The room where I waited for Mrs. Karp was as big as a small barn and full of blue furniture. The bar had a brass rail.

Hilda Karp was a Dresden blonde with an athletic body and brains. By appearing in it, she made the room seem realer. "Mr. Rogers, I believe?" She had my card in her hand, the one with Private Investigator on it.

"Una Sand disappeared yesterday. Her mother said you were her best friend."

"Millicent — Mrs. Dreen — called me early this morning. But as I said then, I haven't seen Una for several days."

"Why would she go away?"

Hilda Karp sat down on the arm of a chair, and looked thoughtful. "I

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can't understand why her mother should be worried. She can take care of herself, and she's gone away before. I don't know why this time. I know her well enough to know that she's unpredictable."

"Why did she go away before?"

"Why do girls leave home, Mr. Rogers?"

"She picked a queer time to leave home. Her husband's coming home tomorrow."

"That's right, she told me he sent her a cable from Pearl. He's a nice boy."

"Did Una think so?"

She looked at me frigidly as only a pale blonde can look, and said nothing.

"Look," I said. "I'm trying to do a job for Mrs. Dreen. My job is laying skeletons to rest, not teaching them the choreography of the *Danse Macabre*."

"Nicely put," she said, as who should say: you win the one-pound box of chocolates and a free ticket to the voluptuous hula fiesta. "Actually there's no skeleton. Una has played around, in a perfectly innocent way I mean, with two or three men in the last year."

"Simultaneously, or one at a time?"

"One at a time. She's monandrous to that extent. The latest is Terry Neville."

"I thought he was married."

"In an interlocutory way only. For God's sake don't bring my name into it. My husband's in business in this town."

"He seems to be prosperous," I said, looking more at her than at the house. "Thank you very much, Mrs. Karp. Your name will never pass my lips."

"Hideous, isn't it? I hope you find her. Jack will be terribly disappointed if you don't."

I had begun to turn towards the door, but turned back. "It couldn't be anything like this, could it? She heard he was coming home, she felt unworthy of him, unable to face him, so she decided to lam out?"

"Millicent said she didn't leave a letter. Women don't go in for all such drama and pathos without leaving a letter. Or at least a marked copy of Tolstoi's *Resurrection*."

"I'll take your word for it." Her blue eyes were very bright in the great dim room. "How about this? She didn't like Jack at all. She went away for the sole purpose of letting him know that. A little sadism, maybe?"

"But she did like Jack. It's just that he was away for over a year. Whenever the subject came up in a mixed gathering, she always insisted that he was a wonderful lover."

"Like that, eh? Did Mrs. Dreen say you were Una's best friend?"

Her eyes were brighter and her thin pretty mouth twisted in amusement. "Certainly. You should have heard her talk about me."

"Maybe I will. Thanks. Goodbye."

A telephone call to a screen writer I knew, the suit for which I had paid a hundred and fifty dollars in a moment of euphoria, and a false air of assurance got me past the studio guards and as far as the door of Terry Neville's dres-

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ing room. He had a bungalow to himself, which meant he was as important as the publicity claims. I didn't know what I was going to say to him, but I knocked on the door and, when someone said, "Who is it?" showed him.

Only the blind had not seen Terry Neville. He was over six feet, colorful, shapely, and fragrant like a distant garden of flowers. For a minute he went on reading and smoking in his brocaded armchair, carefully refraining from raising his eyes to look at me. He even turned a page of his book.

"Who are you?" he said finally. "I don't know you."

"Una Sand —"

"I don't know her, either." Grammatical solecisms had been weeded out of his speech, but nothing had been put in their place. His voice lacked pace and life.

"Millicent Dreen's daughter," I said, humoring him. "Una Ross."

"Naturally I know Millicent Dreen. But you haven't said anything. Good day."

"Una Sand disappeared yesterday. I thought you might be willing to help me find out why."

"You still haven't said anything." He got up and took a step towards me, very tall and wide. "What I said was *good day.*"

But not tall and wide enough. I've always had an idea, probably incorrect, that I could handle any man who wears scarlet silk bathrobes. He saw that idea on my face and changed his tune: "If you don't get out of here, my man, I'll call a guard."

"In the meantime I'd straighten out that delightful marcel of yours. I might even be able to make a little trouble for you." I said that on the assumption that any man with his pan and sexual opportunities would be on the brink of trouble most of the time.

It worked. "What do you mean by saying that?" he said. A sudden pallor made his carefully plucked black eyebrows stand out starkly. "You could get into a very great deal of hot water by standing there talking like that."

"What happened to Una Sand?"

"I don't know. Get out of here."

"You're a liar."

Like one of the clean-cut young men in one of his own movies, he threw a punch at me. I let it go over my shoulder and while he was off balance placed the heel of my hand against his very flat solar plexus and pushed him down into his chair. Then I shut the door and walked fast to the front gate. I'd just as soon have gone on playing tennis with the invisible man.

"No luck, I take it?" Mrs. Dreen said when she opened the door of her apartment to me.

"I've got nothing to go on. If you really want to find your daughter you'd better go to Missing Persons. They've got the organization and the connections."

"I suppose Jack will be going to them. He's home already."

"I thought he was coming tomorrow."

"That telegram was sent yesterday. It was delayed somehow. His ship got in yesterday afternoon."

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"Where is he now?"

"At the beach-house by now, I guess. He flew down from Alameda in a Navy plane and called me from Santa Barbara."

"What did you tell him?"

"What could I tell him? That Una was gone. He's frantic. He thinks she may have drowned." It was late afternoon, and in spite of the whiskey which she drank slowly and steadily like an alcohol lamp, Mrs. Dreen's fires were burning low. Her hands and eyes were limp, and her voice was weary.

"Well," I said, "I might as well go back to Santa Barbara. I talked to Hilda Karp but she couldn't help me. Are you coming along?"

"I have to go to the studio tomorrow. Anyway, I don't want to see Jack just now. I'll stay here."

The sun was low over the sea, gold-leafing the water and bloodying the sky, when I got through Santa Barbara and back onto the coast highway. Not thinking it would do any good but by way of doing something or other to earn my keep, I stopped at the last filling station before the road turned off to Mrs. Dreen's beach-house. It was about a quarter of a mile from the turning.

"Fill her up," I said to the woman attendant. I needed gas anyway.

"I've got some friends who live around here," I said when she held out her hand for her money. "Do you know where Mrs. Dreen lives?"

She looked at me from behind disapproving spectacles. "You should know. You were down there with her today, weren't you?"

I covered my confusion by handing her a five and telling her: "Keep the change."

"No, thank you."

"Don't misunderstand me. All I want you to do is tell me who was there yesterday. You see all. Tell a little."

"Who are you?"

I showed her my card.

"Oh." Her lips moved unconsciously, computing the size of the tip. "There was a guy in a green roadster, I think it was a Chrysler. He went down around noon and drove out again around four I guess it was, like a bat out of hell."

"That's what I wanted to hear. You're wonderful. What did he look like?"

"Sort of dark and pretty good-looking. It's kind of hard to describe. Like the guy that took the part of the pilot in that picture last week — *you* know — only not so good-looking."

"Terry Neville."

"That's right, only not so good-looking. I've seen him go down there plenty of times."

"I don't know who that would be," I said, "but thanks anyway. There wasn't anybody with him, was there?"

"Not that I could see."

I went down the road to the beach-house like a bat into hell. The sun, huge and angry red, was horizontal now, half-eclipsed by the sea and almost perceptibly sinking. It spread a red glow over the shore like a soft and creeping fire. After a long time, I thought, the cliffs would crumble, the sea would dry up, the whole earth

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would burn out. There'd be nothing left but bone-white cratered ashes like the moon.

When I rounded the bluff and came within sight of the beach I saw a man coming out of the sea. In the creeping fire which the sun shed he, too, seemed to be burning. The diving mask over his face made him look strange and inhuman. He walked out of the water as if he had never set foot on land before.

"Who are you?" he shouted to me when I stopped the car.

I walked towards him. "Mr. Ross?"

"Yes." He raised the glass mask from his face and with it the illusion of strangeness lifted. He was just a handsome young man, well set-up, tanned, and worried-looking.

"My name is Rogers."

He held out his hand, which was wet, after wiping it on his bathing trunks, which were also wet. "Oh, yes, Mr. Rogers. My mother-in-law mentioned you over the phone."

"Are you enjoying your swim?"

"I am looking for the body of my wife." It sounded as if he meant it. I looked at him more closely. He was big and husky, but he was just a kid, twenty-one at most. Out of high school into the air, I thought. Probably met Una Sand at a party, fell hard for all that glamor, married her the week before he shipped out, and had dreamed bright dreams ever since. I remembered the brash telegram he had sent, as if life were like the people in slick magazine advertisements.

"What makes you think she drowned?"

"She wouldn't go away like this. She knew I was coming home this week. I cabled her from Pearl."

"Maybe she never got the cable."

After a pause he said: "Excuse me." He turned towards the waves which were breaking almost at his feet. The sun had disappeared, and the sea was turning grey and cold-looking, an anti-human element.

"Wait a minute. If she's in there, which I doubt, you should call the police. This is no way to look for her."

"If I don't find her before dark, I'll call them then," he said. "But if she's here, I want to find her myself." I could never have guessed his reason for that, but when I found it out it made sense. So far as anything in the situation made sense.

He walked a few steps into the surf, which was heavier now that the tide was coming in, plunged forward, and swam slowly towards the raft with his masked face under the water. His arms and legs beat the intricate rhythm of the crawl as if his muscles took pleasure in it, but his face was downcast, searching the darkening sea floor. He swam in widening circles about the raft, raising his head about twice a minute for air.

He had completed several circles and I was beginning to feel that he wasn't really looking for anything, but expressing his sorrow, dancing a futile ritualistic water-dance, when suddenly he took air and dived. For what seemed a long time but was probably about twenty seconds, the surface of the sea was empty except for

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the white raft. Then the masked head broke water, and Ross began to swim towards shore. He swam a laborious side-stroke, with both arms submerged. It was twilight now, and I couldn't see him very well, but I could see that he was swimming very slowly. When he came nearer I saw a swirl of yellow hair.

He stood up, tore off his mask, and threw it away into the sea with an angry gesture. He looked at me angrily, one arm holding the body of his wife against him. The white body half-floating in the shifting water was nude, a strange bright glistening catch from the sea floor.

"Go away," he said in a choked voice.

I went to get a blanket out of the car, and brought it to him where he laid her out on the beach. He crouched over her as if to shield her body from my gaze. He covered her and stroked the wet hair back from her face. Her face was not pretty. He covered that, too.

I said: "You'll have to call the police now."

After a time he answered: "I guess you're right. Will you help me to carry her into the house."

I helped him. Then I called the police in Santa Barbara, and told them that a woman had been drowned and where to find her. I left Jack Ross shivering in his wet trunks beside her blanketed body, and drove to Hollywood for the second time that day.

Millicent Dreen was in her apartment. At noon there had been a full decanter of Scotch on her buffet. At ten o'clock it was on the coffee table beside her chair, and nearly empty. Her face and body had sagged. I wondered if every day she aged so many years, and every morning recreated herself through the power of her will.

She said: "I thought you were going back to Santa Barbara. I was just going to go to bed."

"I did go. Didn't Jack phone you?"

"No." She looked at me, and her green eyes were suddenly very much alive, almost fluorescent. "You found her," she said.

"Jack found her in the sea. She was drowned."

"I was afraid of that." But there was something like relief in her voice. As if worse things might have happened. As if at least she had lost no weapons and gained no foes in the daily battle to hold her position in the world's most competitive and unpredictable city.

"You hired me to find her," I said. "She's found, though I had nothing to do with finding her — and that's that. Unless you want me to find out who drowned her."

"What do you mean?"

"What I said. Perhaps it wasn't an accident. Or perhaps somebody stood by and watched her drown."

I had given her plenty of reason to be angry with me before, but for the first time that day she was angry. "I gave you a hundred dollars for doing nothing. Isn't that enough for you? Are you trying to drum up extra business?"

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"I did one thing. I found out that Una wasn't by herself yesterday."

"Who was with her?" She stood up and walked quickly back and forth across the rug. As she walked her body was remoulding itself into the forms of youth and vigor. She recreated herself before my eyes.

"The invisible man," I said. "My tennis partner."

Still she wouldn't speak the name. She was like the priestess of a cult whose tongue was forbidden to pronounce a secret word. But she said quickly and harshly: "If my daughter was killed I want to know who did it, I don't care who it was. But if you're giving me a line and if you make trouble for me and nothing comes of it, I'll have you kicked out of Southern California. I could do that."

Her eyes flashed, her breath came fast, and her sharp breast rose and fell with many of the appearances of reality. I liked her very much at that moment. So I went away and instead of making trouble for her, I made trouble for myself.

I found a booth in a drugstore on Wilshire and confirmed what I knew, that Terry Neville would have an unlisted number. I called a girl I knew who fed gossip to a movie columnist, and found out that Neville lived in Beverly Hills but spent most of his evenings around town. At this time of night he was usually at Ronald's or Chasen's, a little later at Ciro's. I went to Ronald's because it was nearer, and Terry Neville was there.

He was sitting in a booth for two in the long, low, smoke-filled room, eating smoked salmon and drinking stout. Across from him there was a sharp-faced terrierlike man who looked like his business manager and was drinking milk. Some Hollywood actors spend a lot of time with their managers, because they have a common interest.

I avoided the headwaiter and stepped up to Neville's table. He saw me and stood up, saying: "I warned you this afternoon. If you don't get out of here I'll call the police."

I said quietly: "I sort of am the police. Una Sand is dead." He didn't answer and I went on: "This isn't a good place to talk. If you'll step outside for a minute I'd like to mention a couple of facts to you."

"You say you're a policeman," the sharp-faced man snapped, but quietly. "Where's your identification? Don't pay any attention to him, Terry."

Terry didn't say anything. I said: "I'm a private detective. I'm investigating the death of Una Sand. Shall we step outside, gentlemen?"

"We'll go out to the car," Terry Neville said tonelessly. "Come on, Ed."

The car was not a green Chrysler roadster, but a black Packard limousine equipped with a uniformed chauffeur. When we entered the parking lot he got out of the car and opened the door. He was big and battered-looking.

I said: "I don't think I'll get in. I listen better standing up. I always stand up at concerts and confessions."

"You're not going to listen to anything," Ed said.

The parking lot was deserted and

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far back from the street, and I forgot to keep my eye on the chauffeur. He rabbit-punched me and a gush of pain surged into my head. He rabbit-punched me again and my eyes rattled in their sockets and my body became invertebrate. Two men moving in a maze of stars took hold of my upper arms and lifted me into the car. Unconsciousness was a big black limousine with a swiftly purring motor and the blinds down.

Though it leaves the neck sore for days, the effect of a rabbit-punch on the centers of consciousness is sudden and brief. In two or three minutes I came out of it, to the sound of Ed's voice saying:

"We don't like hurting people and we aren't going to hurt you. But you've got to learn to understand, whatever your name is —"

"Sacher — Masoch," I said.

"A bright boy," said Ed. "But a bright boy can be too bright for his own good. You've got to learn to understand that you can't go around annoying people, especially very important people like Mr. Neville here."

Terry Neville was sitting in the far corner of the back seat, looking worried. Ed was between us. The car was in motion, and I could see lights moving beyond the chauffeur's shoulders hunched over the wheel. The blinds were down over the back windows.

"Mr. Neville should keep out of my cases," I said. "At the moment you'd better let me out of this car or I'll have you arrested for kidnapping."

Ed laughed, but not cheerfully. "You don't seem to realize what's happening to you. You're on your way to the police station, where Mr. Neville and I are going to charge you with attempted blackmail."

"Mr. Neville is a very brave little man," I said. "Inasmuch as he was seen leaving Una Sand's house shortly after she was killed. He was seen leaving in a great hurry and a green roadster."

"My God, Ed," Terry Neville said, "you're getting me in a frightful mess. You don't know what a frightful mess you're getting me in." His voice was high, with a ragged edge of hysteria.

"For God's sake, you're not afraid of this bum, are you," Ed said in a terrier yap.

"You get out of here, Ed. This is a terrible thing, and you don't know how to handle it. I've got to talk to this man. Get out of this car."

He leaned forward to take the speaking tube, but Ed put a hand on his shoulder. "Play it your way, then, Terry. I still think I had the right play, but you spoiled it."

"Where are we going?" I said. I suspected that we were headed for Beverly Hills, where the police know who pays them their wages.

Neville said into the speaking tube: "Turn down a side street and park. Then take a walk around the block."

"That's better," I said when we had parked. Terry Neville looked frightened. Ed looked sulky and worried. For no good reason, I felt complacent.

"Spill it," I said to Terry Neville. "Did you kill the girl? Or did she ac-

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idently drown — and you ran away
o you wouldn't get mixed up in it?
Or have you thought of a better one
han that?"

"I'll tell you the truth," he said. "I
idn't kill her. I didn't even know she
vas dead. But I was there with her
esterday afternoon. We were sun-
ing ourselves on the raft, when a
lane came over flying very low. I
vent away, because I didn't want to
e seen there with her —"

"You mean you weren't exactly
unning yourselves."

"Yes. That's right. This plane came
ver high at first, then he circled back
nd came down very low. I thought
naybe he recognized me, and might be
rying to take pictures or something."

"What kind of a plane was it?"

"I don't know. A military plane, I
guess. A fighter plane. It was a single-
eater painted blue. I don't know mil-
tary planes."

"What did Una Sand do when you
went away?"

"I don't know. I swam to shore, put
on some clothes, and drove away. She
stayed on the raft, I guess. But she was
certainly all right when I left her. It
would be a terrible thing for me if I
were dragged into this thing, Mr.—"

"Rogers."

"Mr. Rogers. I'm terribly sorry if
we hurt you. If I could make it right
with you —" He pulled out a wallet.

His steady pallid whine bored me.
Even his sheaf of bills bored me. The
situation bored me.

I said: "I have no interest in messing
up your brilliant career, Mr. Neville.
I'd like to mess up your brilliant pan
sometime, but that can wait. Until I
have some reason to believe that you
haven't told me the truth, I'll keep
what you said under my hat. In the
meantime, I want to hear what the
coroner has to say."

They took me back to Ronald's,
where my car was, and left me with
many protestations of good fellow-
ship. I said goodnight to them, rub-
bing the back of my neck with an
exaggerated gesture. Certain other
gestures occurred to me.

When I got back to Santa Barbara
the coroner was working over Una
Sand's body. He said that there were
no marks of violence on her body, and
very little water in her lungs and stom-
ach, but this condition was character-
istic of about one drowning in ten.

I hadn't known that before, so I
asked him to put it into sixty-four
dollar words. He was glad to.

"Sudden inhalation of water may
result in a severe reflex spasm of the
larynx, followed swiftly by asphyxia.
Such a laryngeal spasm is more likely
to occur if the victim's face is upward,
allowing water to rush into the nostrils,
and would be likely to be facilitated
by emotional or nervous shock. It may
have happened like that or it may not."

"Hell," I said, "she may not even
be dead."

He gave me a sour look. "Thirty-
six hours ago she wasn't."

I figured it out as I got in my car.
Una Sand couldn't have drowned
much later than four o'clock in the
afternoon on September the seventh.

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It was three in the morning when I got to bed. I got up at seven, had breakfast in a restaurant in Santa Barbara, and went to the beach-house to talk to Jack Ross. It was only about eight o'clock when I got there, but Ross was sitting on the beach in a canvas chair watching the sea.

"You again?" he said when he saw me.

"I'd think you'd have had enough of the sea for a while. How long were you out?"

"A year." He seemed unwilling to talk.

"I hate bothering people," I said, "but my business is always making a nuisance out of me."

"Evidently. What exactly is your business?"

"I'm currently working for your mother-in-law. I'm still trying to find out what happened to her daughter."

"Are you trying to needle me?" He put his hands on the arms of the chair as if to get up. For a moment his knuckles were white. Then he relaxed. "You saw what happened, didn't you?"

"Yes. But do you mind my asking what time your ship got into Frisco on September the seventh?"

"No. Four o'clock. Four o'clock in the afternoon."

"I suppose that could be checked?"

He didn't answer. There was a newspaper on the sand beside his chair, and he leaned over and handed it to me. It was the Late Night Final of a San Francisco newspaper for the seventh.

"Turn to page four," he said.

I turned to page four and found an article describing the arrival of the *USS Guam* at the Golden Gate, at four o'clock in the afternoon. A contingent of Waves had greeted the returning heroes, and a band had played *California, Here I Come.*

"If you want to see Mrs. Dreen she's in the house," Jack Ross said. "But it looks to me as if your job is finished."

"Thanks," I said.

"And if I don't see you again, goodbye."

"Are you leaving?"

"A friend is coming out from Santa Barbara to pick me up in a few minutes. I'm flying up to Alameda with him to see about getting leave. I just had a forty-eight, and I've got to be here for the inquest tomorrow. And the funeral." His voice was hard. His whole personality had hardened overnight. The evening before his nature had been wide open. Now it was closed and invulnerable.

"Good-by," I said, and plodded through the soft sand to the house. On the way I thought of something, and walked faster.

When I knocked, Mrs. Dreen came to the door holding a cup of coffee, not very steadily. She was wearing a heavy wool dressing robe with a silk rope around the waist, and a silk cap on her head. Her eyes were bleary.

"Hello," she said. "I came back last night after all. I couldn't work today anyway. And I didn't think Jack should be by himself."

"He seems to be doing all right."

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"I'm glad you think so. Will you come in?"

I stepped inside. "You said last night that you wanted to know who killed Una no matter who it was."

"Well?"

"Does that still go?"

"Yes. Why? Did you find out something?"

"Not exactly. I thought of something, that's all."

"The coroner believes it was an accident. I talked to him on the phone this morning." She sipped her black coffee. Her hand vibrated steadily, like a leaf in the wind.

"He may be right," I said. "He may be wrong."

There was the sound of a car outside, and I moved to the window and looked out. A station wagon stopped on the beach, and a Navy officer got out and walked towards Jack Ross. Ross got up and they shook hands.

"Will you call Jack, Mrs. Dreen, and tell him to come into the house for a minute?"

"If you wish." She went to the door and called him.

Ross came to the door and said a little impatiently: "What is it?"

"Come in," I said. "And tell me what time you left the ship the day before yesterday."

"Let's see. We got in at four —"

"No, you didn't. The ship did, but not you. Am I right?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You know what I mean. It's so simple that it couldn't fool anybody for a minute, not if he knew anything about carriers. You flew your plane off the ship a couple of hours before she got into port. My guess is that you gave that telegram to a buddy to send for you before you left the ship. You flew down here, caught your wife being made love to by another man, landed on the beach — and drowned her."

"You're insane!" After a moment he said less violently: "I admit I flew off the ship. You could easily find that out anyway. I flew around for a couple of hours, getting in some flying time —"

"Where did you fly?"

"Along the coast. I didn't get down this far. I landed at Alameda at five-thirty, and I can prove it."

"Who's your friend?" I pointed through the open door to the other officer, who was standing on the beach looking out to sea.

"Lieutenant Harris. I'm going to fly up to Alameda with him. I warn you, don't make any ridiculous accusations in his presence, or you'll suffer for it."

"I want to ask him a question," I said. "What sort of plane were you flying?"

"FM-3."

I went out of the house and down the slope to Lieutenant Harris. He turned towards me and I saw the wings on his blouse.

"Good morning, Lieutenant," I said. "You've done a good deal of flying, I suppose?"

"Thirty-two months. Why?"

"I want to settle a bet. Could a plane land on this beach and take off again?"

"I think maybe a Piper Cub could. I'd try it anyway."

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"It was a fighter I had in mind. An FM-3."

"Not an FM-3," he said. "Not possibly. It might just conceivably be able to land but it'd never get off again. Not enough room, and very poor surface. Ask Jack, he'll tell you the same."

I went back to the house and said to Jack: "I was wrong. I'm sorry. As you said, I guess I'm all washed up with this case."

"Goodbye, Millicent," Jack said and kissed her cheek. "If I'm not back tonight I'll be back first thing in the morning. Keep a stiff upper lip."

"You do, too, Jack."

He went away without looking at me again. So the case ended as it had begun, with me and Mrs. Dreen alone in a room wondering what had happened to her daughter.

"You shouldn't have said what you did to him," she said. "He's had enough to bear."

My mind was working very fast. I wondered whether it was producing anything. "I suppose Lieutenant Harris knows what he's talking about. He says a fighter couldn't land and take off from this beach. There's no other place around here he could have landed without being seen. So he didn't land.

"But I still don't believe that he wasn't here. No young husband flying along the coast within range of the house where his wife was — well, he'd fly low and dip his wings to her, wouldn't he? Terry Neville saw the plane come down."

"Terry Neville?"

"I talked to him last night. He was with Una before she died. The two of them were out on the raft together when Jack's plane came down. Jack saw them, and saw what they were doing. They saw him. Terry Neville went away. Then what?"

"You're making this up," Mrs. Dreen said, but her green eyes were intent on my face.

"I'm making it up, of course. I wasn't here. After Terry Neville ran away, there was no one here but Una, and Jack in a plane circling over her head. I'm trying to figure out why Una died. I *have* to make it up. But I think she died of fright. I think Jack dived at her and forced her into the water. I think he kept on diving at her until she was gone. Then he flew back to Alameda and chalked up his flying time."

"Fantasy," she said. "And very ugly. I don't believe it."

"You should. You've got that cable haven't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Jack sent Una a cable from Pearl, telling her what day he was arriving. Una mentioned it to Hilda Karp. Hilda Karp mentioned it to me. It's funny you didn't say anything about it."

"I didn't know about it," Millicent Dreen said. Her eyes were blank.

I went on, paying no attention to her denial: "My guess is that the cable said not only that Jack's ship was coming in on the seventh, but that he'd fly over the beach-house that afternoon. Fortunately, I don't have to de-

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pend on guesswork. The cable will be on file at Western Union, and the police will be able to look at it. I'm going into town now."

"Wait," she said. "Don't go to the police about it. You'll only get Jack in trouble. I destroyed the cable to protect him, but I'll tell you what was in it. Your guess was right. He said he'd fly over on the seventh."

"When did you destroy it?"

"Yesterday, before I came to you. I was afraid it would implicate Jack."

"Why did you come to me at all, if you wanted to protect Jack? It seems that you knew what happened."

"I wasn't sure. I didn't know what had happened to her, and until I found out I didn't know what to do."

"You're still not sure," I said. "But I'm beginning to be. For one thing, it's certain that Una never got her cable, at least not as it was sent. Otherwise she wouldn't have been doing what she was doing on the afternoon that her husband was going to fly over and say hello. You changed the date on it, perhaps? So that Una expected Jack a day later? Then you arranged to be in Hollywood on the seventh, so that Una could spend a final afternoon with Terry Neville."

"Perhaps." Her face was complexly alive, controlled but full of dangerous energy, like a cobra listening to music.

"Perhaps you wanted Jack for yourself," I said. "Perhaps you had another reason, I don't know. I think even a psychoanalyst would have a hard time working through your motivations, Mrs. Dreen, and I'm not one. All I know is that you precipitated a murder. Your plan worked even better than you expected."

"It was accidental death," she said hoarsely. "If you go to the police you'll only make a fool of yourself, and cause trouble for Jack."

"You care about Jack, don't you?"

"Why shouldn't I?" she said. "He was mine before he ever saw Una. She took him away from me."

"And now you think you've got him back." I got up to go. "I hope for your sake he doesn't figure out for himself what I've just figured out."

"Do you think he will?" There was sudden terror in her eyes.

"I don't know," I said from the door, and went out.

***Solution to* "Guess Who?"**

Un-huh — Asa Alden Mayo — better known as "Asey," beloved by all dyed-in-the-wool Cape Codders and many, many others as well. Leading light in a score of intriguing mystery tales from the gifted pen of Phoebe Atwood Taylor.

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WE ARE PAID A COMPLIMENT

There is a pocket-size magazine now being published which takes up where "The Golden Book" of old left off; and it can be shouted from the housetops that this new Golden Book carries on all the noble traditions of its glorious predecessor. In this heyday of multitudinous reprints, in this anthological age, it shines like an eternal beacon of belles lettres; for the traveller weary of "popular" best-sellers, it is an oasis in the desert, the answer to a-man-on-a-desert-island's prayer — in a phrase, an indispensable literary refresher.

Naturally, so literary a magazine does not go in heavily for detective-crime stories — but it does use some. For example, in the five issues dated September 1945 through January 1946, it offered its readers 28 short stories and only 6 of these 28 stories belong properly to the detective-crime genre. (On second thought, 21.4% is not too small at that!) Since it is primarily a reprint magazine, it should be interesting to mystery fans to know what sources the editors use for their selection of detective and crime short stories. Here is a list of the 6 tales in question:

Cornell Woolrich's "The Fingernail"
James M. Cain's "The Baby in the Icebox"
Ben Hecht's "Crime Without Passion"
Lord Dunsany's "The Two Bottles of Relish"
M. P. Shiel's "The S. S."
Phyllis Bottome's "The Liqueur Glass"

The Cornell Woolrich story came from EQMM, issue of September 1944 — it could not have come from any other source because the title, "The Fingernail," was your Editor's own invention. The Cain story was also first reprinted in EQMM, issue of July 1944. Ditto with Hecht's "Crime Without Passion" — first reprinted in EQMM, issue of Spring 1942.

The Lord Dunsany tale had its first book-appearance in America in your Editor's anthology, 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT *(1941). Likewise, the Shiel story had its first anthology appearance in* 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT. *And to round out the half-dozen, Phyllis Bottome's "The Liqueur Glass" also appeared in EQMM, issue of May 1945.*

If only three of the six detective-crime short stories could be traced to EQ editorial sources, magazine and/or anthology, it would be a great compliment to us; but with every single one — all six out of six! — stemming from prior EQ publication, we have been paid a really stupendous compliment! Don't misunderstand: we are properly impressed and we extend our deepest gratitude to the editors of this magazine. Such exclusive detective-

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crime leaning on EQ research by so superb a magazine warms our innards and stimulates our pride; indeed, we feel so editorially aglow that we don't even mind the fact that not in a single instance were we given a credit line — not even when they used our own title for one of the stories.

Nevertheless, we can't help feeling that we would like to return the compliment. *That is, we would like to see this other magazine discover some excellent detective-crime short stories of its own, run them first in their own pages, and then let* us *reprint from* them! *After all, turnabout is fair play and fair play is Chapter One in every detective-story writer's (and editor's) Book of Etiquette . . .*

All of which brings us to the first reprinting of Whitfield Cook's remarkable little story, "Round Trip." Here, dear editors of the new Golden Book, is another crime tale well worth your editorial attention. In all sincerity we hope you decide to use it: it couldn't happen to a better story or in a better magazine.

ROUND TRIP

by WHITFIELD COOK

The little dark man with the near-sighted eyes leaned his head back against the bus seat. It was a largish head for so slight a man, and when he tilted it back like that, his Adam's apple stuck out sharply. His strong hands were heavily still in his lap, but the fingers of the left hand were clamped tensely around the right wrist.

He could hear what the two people in the seat ahead were saying: "Think of maniacs like that being loose in the world!"

Why didn't the bus go faster? Why didn't it get there sooner! Get where? Where was he going? . . . "Maniacs . . . loose in the world!"

He'd go where they'd never find him. They couldn't look everywhere. It wasn't humanly possible for them to look in every little town. Was it? And after a while the police gave up, didn't they? There were lot of unsolved crimes.

"Maniacs" . . . Maniacs didn't look like him. He was a tired little man. He was only thirty-five, but he was so very tired.

Mother . . . I can remember when I was ten. Was I really such an ugly little runt? Was that why the kids chased me? I can remember them chasing me home from school almost every day. And you'd be standing there with the door open, so I could run in quickly. And you'd close it after me, and I'd be safe. I hated those kids, Mother. And I was afraid of them.

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. . . How do I happen to remember that now?

The bus stopped in front of a drug store in a little town. He didn't like it when the bus stopped. He slouched down lower in his seat. His heart would begin to beat heavily. It seemed to be crashing right through his thin chest.

Oh, Ruth, Ruth . . . I haven't even a picture of you. Maybe there'd be a picture of you in the papers. Maybe they got hold of one of our snapshots. Maybe that one of you in your bathing suit at Crystal Lake. . . . Ruth, I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it! . . .

At the next town, the bus driver looked around at him. "This is Miltontown," he called.

He must have bought a ticket to Miltontown. He put on his hat and took his umbrella and overnight bag from the rack and got off.

It was a hot town with a Main Street and rows of stores that looked more or less alike. There was a newspaper blowing along the sidewalk. He could see the word KILLER in large black type. He stooped and picked up the paper. It was the New York *Sentinel;* and there *was* a picture of Ruth. It was not a good picture. She was prettier than that. There was a picture of him, too. An old picture of him in his high-school sweater. It was very blurred. No one would ever recognize him from it.

He folded the paper and put it under his arm. He started walking along the street.

The stores were closed. He remembered it was Sunday. There were a few people in their Sunday clothe strolling along the street. One old lad had a parasol. He hadn't seen a para sol in years. *Mother, you used to carr a pretty green one. . . .*

He passed a cemetery that was se under tall old trees. It looked cool. H walked slowly to a bench and sa down. No one was noticing him. H unfolded the newspaper.

They were looking for him. He wa under suspicion. It didn't say whethe or not they had any trace of him. I told all about Ruth's life. But it soundec all wrong. It didn't sound like Ruthie really was. Then he read: "The diary of Ruth Lansing from the time she met Victor Croat to the day before her death begins on the next page." He turned the page. He'd never known Ruth kept a diary.

"October 27. I bought that yellow dress at Bloomingdale's that I've been so keen on. Ma was sore about it. Says we got no money to throw away on clothes. Everything is dull as hell. Ma rented Mrs. Forbes's old room to a man this morning. He's little and polite and has thin hair. No S.A. Looks like a dope. Name's Victor Croat."

The paper shook in Victor's trembling hands. He remembered that day. He remembered first seeing Ruth. He was standing in the hall, telling Mrs. Lansing he'd take the room, and Ruth came running downstairs. He'd never seen anyone so beautiful. Her lovely little feet in their high heels, her white hands slipping into bright green gloves, that magic, silky blond hair flowing from under her hat.

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"My daughter," said Mrs. Lansing. And Victor knew then that Ruth was something he wanted.

He had smiled a bit and looked down at the floor shyly. Ruth said, "God, I'm late!" and hurried out.

He read more of Ruth's diary. There was no mention of him till November 19th. Then Ruth had jotted down: "Went to a movie with Mr. Croat. Rainy night. Nothing better to do. The little guy seemed very pleased. He's a bookkeeper or something for the Buscher Glass Jar Co. He reminds me of Goggles, the history teacher we had in high school."

Sitting there on the bench, Victor felt ashamed. Why couldn't he have been a good-looking man! Things would have been different then. Why couldn't he have been a big fellow?

The leaf shadows across the graves lengthened as he sat there, his umbrella and bag and hat beside him, his thin, tufty hair blowing a little in the gentle wind. He must decide what he was going to do. He ran a comb through his hair and put on his hat. He left the cemetery and walked up the elm-lined street towards the edge of the town. But where the houses were fewer he saw a home-made sign in the window of an insignificant gray bungalow. He rang the doorbell and talked to a large, bland-faced woman who was slightly deaf. She spoke in a loud flat tone. He said he'd take the room she had for rent.

Victor sat on the bed and wondered what he would do next. Out in the living room someone turned on a radio. The sound filled the house blatantly. Victor sat on the bed motionlessly and heard two dramatic sketches and a review of books. Then there was a news summary. He was the second item. The bloody fingerprints on the bathtub had been identified as his. He was believed to be somewhere in Connecticut. The commentator started to describe him.

A feeling of terrific excitement spread through him. A sensation of horror and nausea. He quietly opened the door of his room. His landlady was sitting by the radio with her back towards him. She would certainly recognize him. He moved towards her. Then he saw she was busy crocheting. And she wasn't even listening to the radio.

He went out of the house. He started walking. He didn't know where. But he couldn't stay inside and listen to that machine which at any moment might say more about him.

Off in the twilit distance he could hear the call of the mourning doves. That minor, lonely cry. It reminded him of Crystal Lake. *Ruthie, those three days were like heaven. . . .*

They had had three days because the Fourth of July had come on a Monday. He had been talking to Ruth about Crystal Lake for a long time and saying she ought to see it. Couldn't she go out there with him some week end during the summer? Well, she said she'd go out the Fourth of July, but she'd have to take her girl-friend, Mona Duffy. Victor was so happy. He smiled secretly to himself all the time. He thought, if only the boys at the

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Buscher office could see him now, going off for a week end with this really beautiful girl. They probably thought he went around with some homely little runt. If they could just see Ruth!

That was a memorable week end. He guessed it was the most fun he'd ever had. The Sunset View Hotel was crowded, and there were a lot of gay things going on all the time. They hiked up to the top of Stonyface Hill, and they canoed to the end of the lake. That was at night. And he kissed Ruth once; but when he did he almost upset the canoe, and that made him a little frightened. Ruth just laughed.

Of course, he was pretty sore at Ruth the last night when they were watching the fireworks, because she let that big blond bruiser who had sort of introduced himself come and sit next to her. He could hardly see the fireworks, he was so mad. There were other fireworks going on in his mind. He thought if he had something sharp he could stick it quickly into the big guy's heart. Even a long penknife would do it. Just quick-like he could do it; the big guy would hardly know what had happened.

Why do I remember all this? What's the good of remembering it? . . . If I could only explain things to you, Ruthie! See? It's like Aunt Gertrude said to me once: "You were conceived in violence, Victor. There wasn't any love between your mother and father. And if you have any of him in you, you'll probably end in violence." . . . I don't think Aunt Gertrude ever liked me. She told Mother I looked the color of stale fish. . . .

Victor had been walking miles through the town. He went into a restaurant and ate a big dinner. Afterwards he walked slowly back towards the bungalow. The family were out. He went to bed, after putting his hat and umbrella and small bag in the closet. He slept soundly. Next morning he was anxious to see a New York paper, to read more of Ruth's diary. It was raining. He took his hat and umbrella and left the house early. He dodged into the little paper store and bought a *Sentinel*. He stood outside under an awning, reading:

"JULY 5. Mona and I went to Crystal Lake with Victor Croat for the Fourth. Victor's awfully sweet to me, the poor lamb. He's not exactly exciting, but he means so well and tries so hard. Mona says so, too. A big, handsome guy named Norman tried to pick me up. I did look a wow all right in my new flowered formal. And Victor got simply furious. I guess he's awfully jealous or something. And for such a little squirt he sure has a terrible temper. Anyway it was better than just sitting home with Ma over the Fourth.

"JULY 16. I lost my job with Greenbay. I'd like to kill the dirty bastard. I cried all last night. Ma said I should have saved some money for a rainy day. But how can you on twenty a week!

"JULY 27. Oh, God, what a summer! What's going to become of me! Ma's so broke, we sometimes go to bed hungry. And I don't even have enough money for lipstick.

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"August 9. Big joke. Last night ctor asked me to marry him. Hontly, I almost laughed in his face. e's an all right guy to go to the mov- with or something; but he's no ıe to have to sleep with the rest of ıur life. Oh Lord, he was shaking all 'er when he asked me. He sure is rious."

Victor's eyes were blurring. He ıuldn't see to read any more. He ent into the dog-wagon next door. here were two or three customers ting at the counter. He climbed onto stool and ordered coffee. He opened ıe newspaper again.

"August 23. I told Victor I'd marry m. Oh God, what a fool I am. But ve got to do something. I can't go on ıis way. I've got to have some kind security."

And he'd been so happy that night. e had taken Ruth out to dinner and ɔught her wine and everything. And had thought he was the luckiest ıan in the world. At last everything ıd come to him. He'd have a beauful wife, and they could have a little ıt out in Sunnyside and a secondınd car, maybe, on long-term payıents. His heart had been flowing ver with love and joy.

The radio was going in the dogagon. It was too loud. And the static as making sharp, crackling sounds. With a start he became conscious of it ılking about him. "The police are earching for Croat in the northern art of Connecticut. He is a small, ark man wearing glasses. He is beeved to carry an overnight bag, in which may be the head of Ruth Lansing, which has not yet been found."

He thought of the overnight bag sitting on the floor of his closet. They might have found it by now. They might be at the bungalow, waiting for him, laying a trap for him. He had one of his weakening spells of terrible fear. He started out towards the opposite end of town. He wouldn't go back to the bungalow at all.

He walked as fast as he dared through the rain, his legs straining tensely at each step. He reached the edge of the town and kept on going. He turned off onto a small country road that twisted into the woods. He found a very old deserted farmhouse. He crossed through the high wet grass and broke in the rotten kitchen door. He put his umbrella in the corner. There were two rickety chairs. He wiped them off with a piece of his newspaper. Then he took off his wet suit and laid it on one of the chairs. He sat down on the other. He was getting terribly tired.

He opened the paper again to Ruth's diary. He hadn't finished it.

"August 28. Nothing ever happens right. I'm scared of what's happening. Here I am engaged to Victor, and I'm suddenly crazy about Mort Phillips. What can I do? And does Mort really love me? He's certainly giving me a rush. Mona met him last week. And then she and him and Bill Weyman and I went out on a double date. I didn't tell Victor, of course. What he doesn't know won't hurt him. I got Victor to buy me a new dress. I just

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had to have something to wear when I went out with Mort. Oh God, he's a handsome bruiser! He has something to do with music publishing. And he knows lots of people in the theatre. I've always wanted to know somebody like him. Oh God, why do I get myself in such messes? Sometimes I just hate myself. But I'm entitled to a little fun, I guess.

"SEPTEMBER 2. I just about decided I wouldn't see Mort again. I suppose you can't have your cake and eat it too. But now he has asked me to go to the Park Roof Club with him. And I've always wanted to go there. It's so swell. So I'm going tomorrow night. Then I'll tell him I can't see him any more. I don't think I'd ever get much from him anyway. I know what he wants. When he kisses me, though, I'm lost. What a Romeo!"

The diary stopped there. "Read the last dramatic entry in Ruth Lansing's Diary in tomorrow's *Sentinel*."

Victor threw down the paper violently. The old red fury was drifting up through his head. That suffocating hatred swept in waves through him. So Ruth had thought she was getting away with something. But he'd known all along. He'd seen Ruth getting into Phillips' car down by the corner. And yet he'd been afraid to say anything about it, afraid Ruth would get angry, and then he'd lose her.

He had known she was going out with Phillips that night. And he'd been desperate. He'd felt really sick all day. And frantic. He didn't know what to do. In the afternoon he decided to send Ruth flowers. She'd get them just b fore she was supposed to go out wi Phillips. Maybe they'd make her reali how much Victor loved her; then s wouldn't go.

She had gone anyway. He'd se her sneak away to meet Phillips wi *his* flowers on.

That's when it had begun, th terrific thing inside of him. Tha when everything began beating fast and faster. During the early hours that evening he walked and walk and walked. Then he went back the house. He went into his own roo and paced up and down there. Ho could Ruth do this to him? . . .

When he heard her come in, l turned out his light, and through tl crack of his door he watched her con upstairs and go into her own roor

He paced on around his room, fro the left side of the bed around to tl right and then back to the left. Ar on and on that way. A half hour passe And by that time he was as despera as a caged animal. People thought th could step all over him, did the They thought they could treat hi like dirt, did they?

He crossed the hall to Ruth's doc He went in quietly. Ruth was sittii at her desk, writing something.

She looked surprised when she sa Victor. "What are you doing in yo undershirt?" she said. That was a she had time to say. Then his han were on her neck. *Ruthie, I was ju going to kiss you. Honest, that's all meant to do! Honest! I wanted to sho you how much I loved you!*

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It was all over so quickly. He was very hazy about what had happened. But he remembered that when he had seen Ruthie's head, so blonde and beautiful, he knew he couldn't leave it. . . .

Mother, do you remember how I cried and cried one day when the boys killed a squirrel? He used to come up and eat out of my hand, that squirrel. . . .

Victor sat there in the deserted farmhouse, listening to the run and drip of the rain outside. He was growing cold, and he trembled. *Mother, I'm cold and hungry and frightened. And I didn't mean it. Honest, I didn't.*

After a while, he fell asleep. He woke up at night and sat there thinking in the dark. He wanted to get a paper in the morning and read the rest of Ruth's diary. Yet he was afraid to go back into town. They'd be waiting for him. They'd have a trap set by now. But he *had* to read Ruth's diary. It was the only thing of hers he had left.

When dawn came, he waited about an hour; then he headed down the road towards the town. He pulled down his hat and went along a side street to the paper store. He walked in, he thought, with a certain amount of casual dignity. They were waiting for him.

One grasped him on the left and one on the right. The handcuffs were on in no time. It was all done quietly.

"I would like to buy a paper," he said to them.

"What for?" they said.

"To read the rest of her diary."

They just looked at him.

"Please," he said.

One of them bought a *Sentinel* and opened it and started reading without much expression:

"SEPTEMBER 3. What a date! Mort sure knows how to show you a good time. And not afraid to spend money either. Oh, God, if only he would want to marry me. But I know he wouldn't ever. Maybe I could trick him into it. Other girls do it, why not me? Then would I give Victor the bye-bye! I must be screwy to think things like that. I ought to marry Victor. He's a bird in the hand. But the more I think of it, the sicker I get. What should I do? If there was just somebody I could talk to. Mona doesn't understand. And Ma's sore at me all the time. Oh God, I feel tired and lousy. What's it all about anyway? If only somebody'd tell me what I ought to do. I want to be happy! God, can't I ever just be happy?"

"Is that all?" asked Victor.

"Yeah."

The tears ran down his stubbly face. Quite a crowd had collected. They stood around and stared at him.

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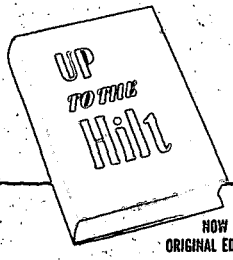

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